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LVOV AFTER THE LIBERATION

(July 1944 - November 1944)

After the liberation I did not leave my hiding place in the monastery on Piotr Skarga St. I was afraid to venture outdoors, and I had good reasons for being afraid. This was a time of fear and uncertainty. Groups of young Poles, carrying arms, prowled the streets; they were convinced that Lvov would remain in Polish hands. Now and then they clashed with rival Ukrainian gangs. A Jew who dared to leave his hideout those days did not return; most likely he would be shot dead in the street. Among those killed in the first days after the liberation was my close friend, Dr. Itzhak Bartfeld. He had survived the hell of the Holocaust in hiding, only to be cut down on the threshold of freedom.

The first meeting with my wife and daughter was heartrending to all of us. It turned out that the number of victims in both our families exceeded fifty. I succumbed to apathy and melancholy. How could one, I thought, carry on living, working and creating in this world pervaded with murder? The person who helped me get back to myself was my faithful life-mate, my wife, who, unlike me, had spent part of the war among people, worked and was protected by good Aryan papers. My sweet little daughter, Ruth, whose entire being was pervaded with the joy of life, also helped me. I must say, though, that at first she did not particularly like her father. Why was this father, who landed on her so suddenly, a Jew? It appeared that she had spent a long time in a Ukrainian-speaking environment where she could hardly have heard kind

remarks about the Jews. She also missed "the church" which she apparently had attended several times, and where people prayed to "the mother and her little child." I had to go to great lengths to explain to her that Jews too were created in God's image and there were good people among them.

By and by I managed to overcome my melancholy and began venturing outdoors, always in the company of my wife. We found a vacant apartment on Dabrowski St. and began living like free people. On the same street I had already come across Jews: pale, frightened creatures who could barely drag their feet. On Jablonowski St. we found a vacant apartment occupying a whole floor, which had previously housed German offices. We took possession of it and subsequently set up a Jewish Committee whose office was located there.

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Our first action was to register the remaining survivors. There was plenty of paper. We pasted white sheets on black cardboard and every Jew coming to the Jewish Committee offices wrote his name on them. Shortly thereafter several Jewish Red Army officers and soldiers showed up, brught us a few sacks of bread and canned food, spoke Yiddish to us, expressed their joy at finding us, and wept together with us.

Every day new names were added to the list and by the end of the first week their number reached 823. Most of those who responded to our registration call were Jews from the environs of Lvov; there were only a handful from Lvov itself. Dr. Sobol, a former Lvov lawyer, volunteered to serve as head of the Committee. By the middle of November 1944, the number of registered Jews reached 2,371 adults and

134 children. Again, only a small number of them were originally from the city of Lvov.

The Soviet authorities recognized this Committee until the end of 1944, at about which time a Soviet-Polish accord was signed providing for the return of Polish citizens to their homeland (repatriation). The signing of the repatriation agreement marked the beginning of a mass exodus of Jews from Lvov and eastern Galicia, which had been incorporated into the Soviet Republic of the Ukraine. I do not believe that I commit a serious historiographical error by stating that at the end of the fall of 1944, with the beginning of repatriation of Polish citizens to their country, the thousand-year-long history of Lvov Jewry came to an end.

In the meantime two important events took place which had a serious impact on the surviving remnant in Lvov. At the end of July 1944, shortly after the liberation, I was summoned by the municipal board of Lvov, which was located at the famous city hall building on Market Square. I was received by one military man and two civilians. Speaking on behalf of the military authorities in the city, the officer began as follows: "We know that you officiated as the rabbi of the Sykstuska synagogue, and we would like to turn over to you one of the synagogues which has remained intact, the one on Weglana St. We do not intend to establish a Jewish community, but if there are Jews wishing to worship together, we will turn this synagogue over to them. It is to be used only for prayer," he emphasized, "and we shall not tolerate any other activity, either in the synagogue or its vicinity."

Later I learned that the military man was a Jew. He did not feel a

need to ask me how the Lvov Jews had fared under the fascist Germans.

One of the civilians present, a young man about thirty years old, was in charge of religious affairs in the municipality. He offered me the post of rabbi in this synagogue. While speaking to me, he gave me a stack of official forms and instructions: "You can sign them here in our presence," he said. Of course I was not so reckless as to sign them on the spot. I replied forcefully that I must first consider their offer in private. However, I was willing to take custody of the synagogue and replied that I would find a few gabbaim (synagogue managers) to run it.

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The second civilian turned out to be a representative of the Ukrainian Academy of Sciences, Romanchenko. Addressing me in a friendly and polite way, he said: "I would like to speak to you about matters of the spirit. You should know that the famous library of the Lvov Jewish community, located on Rzeznicka St. had not been damaged and its collections were preserved. The Germans had sealed the main entrance, which certainly indicates that they planned to transfer the whole library to Germany. The building on Rzeznicka St. was heavily damaged by shelling and bombardment and we plan to transfer the entire library to Sykstuski St. If you agree, we would like to appoint you the library director."

Needless to say, I agreed at once and made an appointment with him for August 1 at 8 a.m. at Rzeznicka St. to take formal delivery of the library collections.

It is worth recording that the Soviet intelligence services

operated with awesome efficiency. Within just a few days after the liberation they already possessed fairly detailed information about persons and events in the city.

The synagogue at Weglana St. presented a terrible sight. The Nazis had turned it into a stable and tore out its windows and doors. Aryan residents who had taken possession of Jewish apartments turned the gutted synagogue building into their garbage dump. And to think that this was the famous Hadashim synagogue built by the community leader and philanthropist Rabbi Jacob Glanzer in 1856. Rabbi Yekele Glanzer was was of the Zydaciow hassidim. The Zydaciow Rabbi, Itzhak Izyk, came personally for the ceremony dedicating the synagogue. It was he who proposed to name it Hadashim according to Lamentations (3:23): "They [the Lord's mercies] are new (hadashim) every morning; great is thy faithfulness." This synagogue was meant to serve as a counterweight to the new temple built by the liberals on Zolkiewski St. In the course of time the Belz hassidim took over the synagogue and turned it into a stronghold of extreme Orthodoxy in Lvov. Solidly built, it withstood the ravages of occupation, whereas other synagogues were destroyed by the Germans, and what the Germans could not accomplish, the local Aryan residents completed.

Slowly we managed to renovate the synagogue with the help of several Jews. After the disbandment of the Jewish Committee, the synagogue became the only Jewish center in Lvov in those days.

On August 1, I met with Romanchenko,the official of the Ukrainian Academy of Sciences. He was escorted by a few policemen who broke open the doors of the library. We went inside. The library was indeed

intact, even though it was covered with dust and mould that had destroyed many books. A locksmith fitted another lock on the door and I was given the key. I was assigned the task of moving the entire collection to Sykstuski St., to hire three qualified librarians, and to find the old catalogue and update it.

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The library of the Lvov community was one of the best and most beautiful Jewish libraries in Galicia. Its official name was "The Library of the Israelite Community in Lvov" (Izraelicka Biblioteka Gminna we Lwowie in Polish). Its director, Rabbi Yehuda Cohen, a talmudic scholar, learned man and excellent bibliographer, was killed in the Aktion of March 1942. There was hardly a book on Judaica published in the last century which was not purchased by Cohen for the library. Its section of Responsa literature contained very rare items and the entire responsa collection was probably unequalled anywhere in the world. In my library work I was assisted by two people: Jacob Rand, a talmudic scholar and well-known Mizrahi figure, and a Polish writer and amateur Talmudist, Tadeusz Zaderecki, sent to me by Romanchenko.

Besides the Hadashim synagogue, the library became the second center concentration for the surviving remnant. Unfortunately, the library did not stay in Lvov for long. According to what Zaderecki told me in Warsaw, it was moved to Kiev at the end of 1946.

After the liberation, several weeks passed before I recovered--physically and psychologically--from the ravages of the war. Working with boundless zeal, enthusiasm and energy, I began gathering around me the surviving Jews for consultations and meetings which took place in

the Hadashim synagogue and in the communal library. The subject was always the same: What do we do now? How can we get out of here? How can we establish contact with the Land of Israel? If there was one thing clear to us it was that: we could not stay here in Lvov, or in any other place in the whole of the western Ukraine. In the meantime the war continued to rage. Now and then German bombers appeared in the sky dropping their load of bombs on the city. But at this stage, everyone knew that the war was drawing to an end and that the Germans were to be soundly defeated. Every day the radio broadcast news about the advances of the Red Army. Every new German retreat filled us with joy.

By and by the circle of people gathering in the Hadashim synagogue began to expand. Several important religious figures joined us: the former rabbi of Brody, Rabbi Moshe Steinberg, whom we declared, temporarily, as the Chief Rabbi of Lvov, or Mara DeAtra (Rabbi of the town); the young and learned Rabbi Itzhak Izyk Liebes, who had tried to reestablish the Jewish community in Zloczow immediately after the liberation; a young rabbi by the name of Leichter, scion of that renowned family of rabbis from Trembowla. These three rabbis had spent the war in hiding in the houses of Christians in eastern Galicia and now were busy planning for a better future for the surviving remnant.

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One Saturday a middle-aged Jew, Rudolf Reder, appeared at the Hadashim synagogue. Before the war Reder owned the soap factory in the Zniesienie district. Reder was the first, perhaps the only Jew to escape from the death camp of Belzec to bear witness to this place about which the wildest speculations circulated during the war.

In my work-room at Sykstuska St., where Zionist activists and the surviving Jewish intelligentsia visited me, the first connections were established aimed at solving the tragic problem of redeeming the children. No one supplied us with funds to redeem Jewish children from Christians who had hidden them. Whenever a Polish or Ukrainian couple brought us a child who had been entrusted to them by its parents before an Aktion, and asked for reward, we would undertake a collection to raise some money among the survivors to redeem the child. Truth to tell, more often than not the reward money was pitifully small, but in most cases it was enough for the poverty-stricken family who brought the child. In any event, the value of the reward was primarily symbolic, for how could one repay for sheltering a Jewish child in those times? In many cases the Pole or a Ukrainian in question risked his or her life as well as the lives of their family. Whether or not the parents of the child had paid them a certain amount of money for this was of no consequence. Also, there were many Christian rescuers who brought Jewish children to the Hadashim synagogue and handed them over to us without demanding any reward. There were people of exceptionally high moral standards among them.

The returned children were accommodated among the survivors because there were no orphanages or children's homes.

Some Christian rescuers refused to part with their proteges, arguing that they had come to love them and provided them with a warm, loving foster family. The story of the daughter of Rabbi Halberstamm, the rabbi of Zaklikow, is a good example of this painful problem.

Halberstamm was married to the daughter of the famous gaon, the

late Rabbi Dov-Berish Weidenfeld, one of the greatest rabbis in Galicia, who made his name as the "rabbi of Trzebinia."

When the war broke out, Halberstamm and his wife were in Lvov and soon found themselves in the Lvov ghetto. In early June 1943, his wife gave birth to a daughter in the house of a Polish midwife. The mother left the infant with the midwife. The Halberstamm couple were killed during the liquidation of the ghetto in the middle of June 1943.

These details were revealed to me by a Jewish woman who knew the case. She also gave me the address of the Polish midwife at Zyblikiewicza St. The next day I set out for this address, knocked on the door, introduced myself and said that I was a friend of the Halberstamm family. I explained that I wanted to know what had happened to their daughter and perhaps even to take her to my home.

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The midwife confirmed the story. Mrs. Halberstamm had, in fact, given birth to a girl in her house. She had supplied her with addresses of people abroad to whom the child was to be sent after the war. "But," she said, "my neighbors knew that a Jewess gave birth in my house, which prevented me from keeping her. I was afraid of being informed upon. I handed over the girl to a childless Polish couple who took her in gladly." The midwife gave me their name and address. It turned out they lived on the same street--Zyblikiewicza.

I set out right away for the house of the Polish foster parents. A middle-aged woman opened the door and asked politely: "What is it that you are looking for?" I decided to tell her the truth about the purpose of my visit. I thought that in this way I would be able to observe her

reactions and plan my steps accordingly. At first the woman went pale and stood for a moment with her mouth open. But she recovered her strength immediately, color returned to her cheeks and she shrieked in a shrill, angry voice: "It's a lie, a stinking lie! Never in my life have I met with the midwife you're talking about!" While screaming, she pushed me outside. However, I managed to catch a glimpse of a baby girl, about two years old, standing on the threshold of the inner room. I realized that the midwife told the truth and that the granddaughter of the rabbi of Trzebinia was being brought up in the house of a Polish family.

Several days later I returned to the couple's house. This time I met the husband, also middle-aged. He received me very politely and asked me to sit down. Speaking calmly, he tried to convince me that the entire affair was a sham. He had married his wife here in Lvov, he explained, and here she gave birth to a girl two years ago. He could not answer my question as to what could have prompted the midwife to send me, a Jew, to this particular childless family.

I decided to seek police intervention; perhaps they would help me to restore the girl to the fold of Israel. I was distressed to hear the Police Commissioner telling me that according to Soviet law the legal mother is not necessarily the biological mother but the woman who raised the child. Moreover, if the biological mother of the girl was no longer living, why should the child be taken away from its mother now?

I refused to let the matter rest and during my stay in Lvov I made repeated visits to the family. Each visit only strengthened my conviction that the daughter of the rabbi of Trzebinia was, indeed,

being raised there.

Sometime later the couple left Lvov and returned to Poland together with thousands of other Polish repatriates. In the course of my wanderings I lost the notebook in which I had written down their names.

I quote this story because it was typical. In my activity in this field I learned of many such cases. In all probability, thousands, perhaps even tens of thousands of Jewish children remained in Christian homes without knowing their origins. Some of them are aware of it, but refrain from acknowledging it for various reasons.

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Although the guns had not yet fallen silent and the end of the war was still months away, official investigators set about gathering materials on Nazi crimes. One of the first such investigators in Lvov was a renowned historian, Dr. Filip Fridman, who had spent the occupation in the Lvov ghetto and in hiding in the house of a Polish Christian. I remained in close contact with him and sought his advice on various matters connected with my work among the survivors.

Every week we took the list of survivors from the walls of the apartment housing the Jewish Committee at Jablonski St. and typed it in the communal library. This is how we compiled our first statistics, according to the instructions of Dr. Fridman.

One morning, at the end of August 1944, Dr. Fridman, accompanied by a visitor from the Soviet Union, came to see me in my workroom. The Soviet visitor turned out to be an historian and investigator of Nazi crimes, Vladimir Belayev. He sought information about the sufferings and martyrdom of the Lvov Jewish community. I spent two whole days with

him, relating all I knew about the ghetto, the Janowski camp, about the smaller death camps in the vicinity of Lvov, and the attitude of the Christian population toward Jews. We visited the location of the Janowski camp and the old graveyard at Szpitalna St.

Before our trip to the graveyard I took with me the book Holy Tombstone (Mazevath Kodesh), issued in Lvov in 1869, a true rarity, describing the tombstones in the old cemetery. The book had been preserved in the Lvov community library. Belayev meticulously recorded the names of great rabthe bis of the Lvov community who lay buried in this cemetery. They included Rabbi Zvi Hirsh Ashkenazi, known as Hokham Zvi, who first officiated in Amsterdam and then in Lvov; Rabbi David Ben Shmuel Halevi, known as the composer of Turey Zahav (commentaries to Shulkhan Arukh), and others.

The cemetery lay in ruins. I told Belayev how, as a prisoner in Janowski camp, I pulled down the tombstones with my own hands and then paved the yard of the Cadet School in the camp with them.

We inspected the ruins of the burned synagogues, and tarried by the rubble of the famous Turey Zahav synagogue, known under its popular name Di Goldene Royse Schul. I told Belayev about the magnificent baroque architecture of this synagogue and about the legend of the Golden Rose, which seemed to interest him greatly.

It was from Belayev that I heard for the first time what was to become the staple of the official Soviet version of the Holocaust: "The Nazi Fascists exterminated millions of Soviet, Polish and Ukrainian civilians." Not one word about millions of Jews. These victims were anonymous Soviet or Polish nationals.

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In September 1944, the stream of Jews returning to Lvov grew stronger. Their exact number was difficult to determine since many did not dare write their real names on the list put up by the Jewish Committee. They had come mostly from the liberated areas of eastern Galicia and from Russia itself, or rather from the western Ukraine. Those who could not find an apartment found accommodation in the women's gallery of the Hadashim synagogue; before long every corner in the gallery was occupied. The place was packed with people; they strolled across the expansive courtyard, children played games, families built cooking stoves with bricks, washed their clothes, enjoyed the last rays of the summer sun and sang songs. Overall, they gave the impression of a band of happy-go-lucky Gypsies. But it was enough to start a conversation with them to get a completely different impression: they were indeed free, but far from happy. Who were all these Jews who filled every corner of the Hadashim synagogue?

Upon liberation, each surviving Jew, individually or in groups, tried to return to his native town and to his apartment. The apartment was, of course, occupied by Poles who would greet him with hatred and resentment.

What would such a Jew look for in the town?

The uppermost thingin his mind was the question: Perhaps some of my relatives or friends survived; perhaps someone knows where and when my parents, relatives, or children died?

Some of the returning Jews came to receive the meager belongings they had entrusted to the care of their Christian neighbors prior to

the liquidation of the ghetto. Some probably wanted to dig up the money they had buried in various hiding places before fleeing the township. Everywhere, practically without exception, they met the same response: an expression of puzzlement. "What? There are still live Jews?" Sometimes they encountered unconcealed hatred: "So Hitler did not finish off all the Jews..."

Only a handful of Jews managed to recover their property. There were also cases of murder in which Jews who had returned to their former homes to search for belongings they had left behind were murdered the first night after their return. But one must not generalize. There were also a few upright Poles and Ukrainians who extended a warm welcome to the returning Jews and expressed their condolences. These are the true righteous among the nations. We shall remember them with great warmth. God forbid that we forget them.

In the meantime news began arriving from Lublin. On July 22, 1944, with the liberation of the areas east of the Vistula River and the entry of the Soviet and Polish army there, the Soviet Government established the Polish National Liberation Committee--PKWN (Polski Komitet Wyzwolenia Narodowego). The PKWN issued a document

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entitled the July Manifesto, which stated that the Polish National Liberation Committee was the Polish Provisional Government, and spelled out its responsibilities in the civilian and military spheres. The July Manifesto also addressed friendly words toward the surviving Jewish remnant.

The fourteen signatories of the July Manifesto represented all

political parties and groupings within Polish society. One of them was Dr. Emil Zomerstein, a well-known Zionist leader and deputy in the Polish Sejm (Diet) before the war.

In those days we, the survivors in Lvov, viewed the July Manifesto as a ray of hope. We were not familiar with nor did we learn about the developments preceding the Manifesto and the political morass it created. We were glad there was an address to turn to, a public body in which a major figure of the Jewish public participated to whom we could appeal. In any event, we could not stay in Lvov, no matter what.

My first contact with Dr. Zommerstein was occasioned by sending him the list of the Jewish survivors from Lvov. A Lvov native himself, he was bound to evince interest in the list. In the meantime, however, we had to attend to the needs of the survivors. The High Holidays were drawing near, and the Hadashim synagogue still had neither windows nor doors or, needless to say, benches for worshippers.

I was able to complete this task thanks only to the help of the head gabbai (manager of the synagogue), a dear soul, Rabbi Katriel Schwarz, a wonderful sensitive person of refined mind. A scholar and a Habbad hassid, he burned with the proverbial hassidic zeal for everything connected with sanctity and purity. Small and nimble, he had spent that war with his family as a partisan in a bunker in the Przemysl forest.

Rabbi Katriel, together with other gabaim, among whom a Russian Jew from Kremenchog by the name of Yosef (I do not recall his family name) deserves special mention, worked miracles in restoring some semblance of the synagogue's former glory in advance of the High Holidays. From - some place they brought in boards and building materials. On the eve of

Rosh Hashana the synagogue began to look a little like its former self. For the time being prayers were conducted in a side room on the second floor.

Among his other talents Rabbi Katriel excelled in discovering Torah scrolls. On the eve of the High Holidays we already had several complete scrolls in our possession some of them singed. However, there was no place to put them, since every free space was occupied by families of refugees.

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Only several dozen Jews prayed with us on Rosh Hashana; others seemed to be unaware of the existence of the Hadashim synagogue. But on Yom Kippur the place was packed with worshippers and many others stood outside. Guards were placed among the worshippers and around the synagogue; a long time had passed since the Aryan residents of Lvov had seen several hundred Jews gathering openly in a synagogue, and we could not foresee their reaction.

We managed to assemble several dozen prayerbooks and several holiday prayerbooks, as well as a few prayer shawls. This was all we could distribute among the worshippers. The stairs leading to the Ark of the Law built in the eastern wall were not damaged. However, the Ark's doors and its interior had been torn out, which lent it the look of an open grave. Nor did we have the curtain of the Ark and decided to cover it with an improvised curtain made of torn prayer shawls. The only thing we had enough of were Torah scrolls.

The leader of the congregation, who stood before the Ark on the night of Kol Nidre, found himself unable to go through the service

calmly. Now and then he broke down crying and the congregation wept with him. The wounds, even if scarred, had not healed and on this Kol Nidre night in Lvov the scars were torn open. How can one describe the distress of the Jewish survivors on Yom Kippur of 1944 in the only remaining synagogue in Lvov?

The gathered Jews were moved from the bottom of their hearts, anguished, but not crushed. From their eyes flowed not the tears of the ghetto, the tears of hopelessness, which cannot be wiped off one's face. The tears of Yom Kippur of 1944 poured down like a good rain; they cleansed the filth, the humiliation, the painful memories of the days of destruction. We left the synagogue with our spirits uplifted, our will strengthened, our teeth clenched. We were ready to carry on with redoubled vigor the longstanding Jewish struggle: not to surrender, not to doubt the eternity of Israel. It was in this spirit that I gave my High Holidays sermons in 1944 in Lvov.

On the night of Yom Kippur, immediately after the first meal, we set up, according to custom, the first pillar of the sukka (booth). Although we were able to observe the commandment of erecting a tabernacle, we were unable to observe the commandment of the "four species" [of plants used on the Feast of Tabernacles]. We did drink l'haim, and broke into a gay dance which developed into an enthusiastic hora. All the worshippers, including women and children, joined in the song "Bring nigh our dispersed from among the nations and gather our scattered from the corners of the earth." How topical to our ears was the prayer on that Feast of Tabernacles: "The Merciful shall prop up the falling tabernacle of David."

As I said earlier, the synagogue became a known address for the Jews who began arriving from various city districts on all sorts of business. Some came because they wished to be among their brethren; others came looking for their relatives. Some came to have their chickens slaughtered by a ritual slaughterer from among the refugees, who plied his trade in the corner of the synagogue courtyard. In one case his presence almost led to a disaster.

The synagogue at 3 Weglana St. adjoined the famous market square known as Plac Teodora. From morning till late in the evening the

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market square was crowded with people dealing in all sorts of merchandise. The synagogue, its residents and prayers obviously attracted the attention of customers and sellers in the market. Christian neighbors, who lived in apartments previously owned by Jews, watched menacingly the Jews who dared to return and resettle in the city.

The incident happened during the Festival of Tabernacles. One day in the afternoon, Christian parents who lived near the synagogue began searching nervously for their five-year-old son. He had left in the morning to play outdoors and had failed to return home. The worried parents began asking neighbors and passers-by about the child. One of the women searching for him entered the synagogue courtyard to make inquires among the Jews. There she caught sight of the bloodstained ritual slaughterer who at that very moment was washing his butcher's knife. She also noticed the bloodstained wall. Apparently she made a connection between the child who disappeared, the bloodstained ritual

slaughterer, and the wall splattered with blood. She reached the inescapable conclusion that the Jews had snatched the child and slaughtered him to use his blood for Passover matzoth. Screaming, the woman fled from the synagogue courtyard only to reappear within seconds with the boy's parents. She kept screaming: "There you are, here they've slaughtered your boy, they want to use his blood to bake matzoth!"

The Jews lost no time in realizing the meaning of this accusation and its possible dreadful consequences. They blocked the main entrance to the synagogue and dispatched a messenger to the police station. It must be noted that the police commandant reacted immediately by sending a group of policemen who dispersed the angry, bloodthirsty crowd. Meanwhile the child had been found: it turned out that all this time he had been playing at his friend's house near the synagogue.

On one of the intermediate days of the Feast of Tabernacles I had a visitor: Dr. Zommerstein's son-in-law, Dr. Walisz, an officer and military physician in a Polish army division. He brought me a letter and greetings from his father-in-law, as well as an invitation to come to Lublin. Dr. Zommerstein had received my letters and the lists of survivors and had an important offer to make to me.

After a short consultation with my wife, we decided to accept Dr. Zommerstein's invitation. As a matter of fact, not one among the surviving Jews thought of staying in Lvov. All our hopes were pinned on Poland from where news was reaching us about the new Jewish settlement being organized on liberated Polish territory. Jews began leaving Lvov in droves and set out for Lublin. The frontiers were open, but the

trains were packed with soldiers.

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For the time being I left my family--my wife, my little daughter Ruth, and Nathan Levin, 12 years old, son of Rabbi Yehezkel Levin--in Lvov. Holding a special permit issued by the Academy of Sciences ('komandirovka') I set off for Lublin.

On November 15, 1944, I bade goodby to the Hadashim synagogue. I knew that I was leaving behind me an address where Jews could turn to: Jews of the present and of the hidden tomorrow; Jews of all times and of all regimes. For all of them there is a synagogue at 3 Weglana St. in the former Lvov ghetto.

The two thousand-year-long history of the Jewish people in the diaspora teaches us that when portentous winds begin to blow in the Jewish street and the storm threatens Jewish lives and their institutions, only one thing remains--the synagogue. This is where they can turn to, this is where the spark of eternal Israel is kept alive.

This truth was demonstrated time and again in the recent history of Eastern European Jewry.

The Meeting with Dr. Emil Zommerstein in Lublin

My journey to Lublin lasted a whole week. I rode trains and hitched rides. It was a rainy, gray day when I arrived. Rooms were hard to come by and for the time being I found accommodations in a house filled with refugees at 3 Wyszynski St.

Shortly after my arrival I telephoned Dr. Zommerstein in his office in the government building. He asked me to come to his house in the

evening.

I met an elderly Jew, crushed and worn-out, with a white expansive beard, and limping slightly in his left leg. I could barely recognize him even though I had known him personally before the war. At that time he was a member of the congregation of the synagogue where I officiated as a rabbi; I used to meet him on numerous social occasions. In his long public career he had served as a member of the Polish Diet in the years 1922-27 and again in 1929-39. In late summer 1939, he was placed under arrest by the Soviets as a known Zionist leader and activist in Galicia. Since then he had passed through numerous Soviet prisons. Only in 1944, when the Soviets were about to proclaim the establishment of the Polish Provisional Government, was he released from prison and, sick and exhausted, brought to Moscow. Subsequently he arrived in Lublin as one of the fourteen members of the Polish National Liberation Committee and was appointed Minister for War Compensation.

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In actual fact, Dr. Zommerstein served as a Jewish representative in the Polish Provisional Government. His mission was to gain the sympathy of Jewish and non-Jewish public opinion in the West for the Polish National Liberation Committee.

At about that time, in November 1944, the Central Committee of Polish Jews was established and Dr. Zommerstein was appointed its chairman.

Our meeting was a deeply moving experience for both of us. I told him about life in the Lvov ghetto. He asked about many of his friends, acquaintances and relatives. Unfortunately, I did not have good news

for him.

Dr. Zommerstein opened our meeting with a review of the situation. He had used guarded expressions in conversations with members of the Central Committee of Polish Jews, but here in his home he was candid with me. In his view the situation in the liberated areas of Poland remained fluid. Although the Provisional Government included representatives of nearly all progressive political factions in Poland, it was the Soviet Union which was calling the shots in determining the shape of the ruling regime in the new Poland, and, in his view, in the whole region. For the time being they tolerated pluralism, but this tolerance was temporary. Sooner or later the Communists, in the shape of the Polish Workers Party--PPR (Polska Partia Robotnicza), would take over the reins of power. Also, in his view, the attitude of the Provisional Government toward the Jews was not all that clear. Although the July Manifesto contained a few sympathetic sentences about the tragic losses sustained by the Jews in Poland and pronounced full equal rights for Jews, it nonetheless treated the Jews as individual citizens and not at all as a national ethnic group. Having summed up his position, Dr. Zommerstein presented to me the following conclusions:

1. There was no way of knowing how long the present pluralist government would last.
2. There was no way of knowing how long the Central Committee of Polish Jews would function with its present composition and mandate.
3. Under current conditions, it was impossible to tell whether the authorities would coopt Dr. Zommerstein and representatives of other Zionist groupings to the next Jewish public body.

4. The Jewish community as an autonomous body with legal status was not planned to exist in postwar Poland. This much Dr. Zommerstein gathered in his official contacts. However, if religious Jews expressed a desire to worship together and observe the commandments of Judaism, the authorities were prepared to establish a special religious body for that purpose.

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5. The Government was willing to establish an army rabbinate which would attend to the religious needs of Jewish soldiers. Dr. Zommerstein had received a great many letters from Jewish soldiers fighting on the front and submitted a request in this matter to Defence Minister Rola-Zymierski. After all, if there was a Catholic army chaplaincy, there was no reason why there should not be an army rabbinate.

Dr. Zommerstein stressed that, as time was running out, every opportunity must be seized and even the minimum that the present Polish Government was willing to grant us must be accepted without delay. We could not know, he argued, what the future had in store for us. Should all other ties be severed, at least we would have the synagogue, which, despite its limited influence, would provide an address for Jews in Poland.

Toward the end of our meeting Dr. Zommerstein made me an offer of the post of Chief Rabbi in the Polish army and asked me to undertake organizational preparations in advance of the establishment of Jewish religious communities in Poland. If I agreed, he would introduce me to Prime Minister Osabka-Morawski to discuss with him civilian problems of Jews, and to Defence Minister Rola-Zymierski to discuss my candidacy

for the post of Chief Rabbi in the Polish army.

After a prolonged exchange of views about the general situation and the nature of the two appointments, I accepted. The next day things began to materialize.

Preliminary talks between Dr. Zommerstein and the two politicians lasted for about a week. At the end of November the Prime Minister's office invited me for a meeting with the Prime Minister. Dr. Zommerstein ushered me in, made the introductions and briefed the Minister on my biography: my studies, education, rabbinical and educational activity in Lvov, and, finally, my ordeal during the occupation. At the end he proposed that I be assigned the task of undertaking the necessary organizational preparations in advance of taking charge of Jewish religious affairs in the country. Dr. Zommerstein also handed the Prime Minister my memorandum concerning the restoration of religious life for the Jews in Poland, which was to be based, more or less, on current communal activities.

The Prime Minister leafed briefly through my memorandum and then announced in strong terms that "We shall not reactivate the Jewish community in all its aspects as it was before the war. However, we shall enable you to freely pursue religious life under the protection of the Government."

After a brief conversation the Prime Minister summoned the Interior Minister, Jozef Maslanko, handed him the protocol of our conversation and, turning to me, said: "Starting today, you will negotiate with him on all the questions we have discussed."

The official title of Jozef Maslanko was Minister of Public Administration, or, in other words, Interior Minister. He was a dry man and very obstinate by temperament. Our first discussion focused on the name of the religious association to be established. I suggested that despite the new definition of its competencies and legal status, the organization be given its old name of Jewish Religious Community (Zydowska Gmina Wyznaniowa), whereas Maslanko favored a new name which would underline the solely religious nature of the community: Jewish Religious Association (Zydowskie Zrzeszenie Religijne). It took me some time to realize that the name had been determined in advance and the entire discussion was superfluous.

In Maslanko's room worked a young man, Jaroslaw Demianczuk, who had been appointed director of the Section for Religious Affairs.

A circular letter concerning the provisional organization of religious life for the Jews in Poland was to be drawn up and edited by his department and under his supervision. Our joint sessions at the Section of Religious Affairs took place in the first days of December 1944. The circular letter, which in the meantime went through several revisions, was not promulgated until February 10, 1945.

The second meeting took place in the afternoon of the same day in the office of the Minister of Defence. An officer was waiting for me at the main entrance to the High Command, and ushered me into General Zymierski's office without delay. Dr. Zommerstein was already waiting for me. My curriculum vitae and work plan, which I had prepared with great care and attention to detail, were lying on the table. General Zymierski greeted me politely, with friendliness and even considerable

warmth. The man had a rich past behind him. He had established his reputation in the war for Polish independence and had reached the rank of general already under Pilsudski, but because of his liberal and leftist views, he was dismissed from the army. During the German occupation he surfaced as a partisan in the woods and soon became one of the leaders of the left-wing partisans. After the liberation of Polish territories in the east and the dismissal of General Berling from the Polish army established in Russia, Michal Rola-Zymierski was appointed the Supreme Commander (Naczelny Dowodca) of the Polish army and coopted to the PKWN with the title of Marshal and Minister of Defence.

Before long I realized that he was very favorably disposed toward the Jews and the Jewish question; one could say he was even warm-hearted toward the Jews. He beheld the Holocaust with all its horrors with his own eyes, and sincerely deplored Polish anti-Semitism, whose expressions he had witnessed even among the partisans. However, he expressed his belief that the new Poland would fight anti-Semitism vigorously and would not tolerate any anti-Jewish activities.

During this meeting the army rabbinate was established. It was to consist of a chief rabbi and three field rabbis. General Rola-Zymierski appointed me as Chief Rabbi of the Polish army with the rank of major; every six months I was to be promoted up to the rank of colonel. Later I appointed three field rabbis: Yeshayahu Drucker, Aharon Beker and N. Stieglitz. All three received the rank of captain.

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These two meetings in late November 1944, which in accordance with

the express wishes of Dr. Zommerstein were not publicized, laid the foundations of Jewish religious life in liberated Poland. I must say, however, that the conversation with Dr. Zommerstein which opened my eyes to the new situation in Poland did not provide answers to all the questions which troubled me. In fact, the overall picture of Jewish life in Poland after the Holocaust remained very vague indeed. Would the Jews build a new life on the graves of millions of martyrs? How many Jews survived the war in the country? How many of them were planning to stay in Poland? And how would those who decided to stay go about rebuilding their lives? These questions kept troubling my feverish mind, but there were no answers. Despite all these uncertainties I plunged into work with great energy. Hitler, may his name be blotted out, had not crushed us; there was no power in the world able to crush us.

The formal procedures associated with my enlistment lasted until December 20, 1944. In the meantime I began following the developments among the handful of Jewish survivors who had come to Lublin in an attempt to rebuild their lives. How did they fare and who were their leaders?

There were two rabbis in Lublin in those days. One of them was Rabbi Abraham Isakhar Engelard, son of the rabbi of Sosnowce, a magnificent example of a rabbinic personality. After the liquidation of the ghettos he joined the partisans and throughout his sojourn in the woods he never touched non-kosher food. I met him in Lublin in November 1944 in Beth Peretz; a minyan had gathered for prayers and I was able to meet a handful of observant Jews who wished to pray together. Rabbi

Engelard did not tarry in Lublin, however. Torah scroll in hand, he arrived at the township of Wlodawa and set about organizing a small community there. It was nothing short of a miracle that he succeeded in establishing a ritual bath, the first in Poland after the war. With the liberation of the town of Sosnowce he returned to his father's pulpit, founded a community and officiated as its rabbi until 1949 (at the time of this writing he was in Bnei-Brak, Israel, as the Rabbi of the Radzin hassidim, surrounded by flocks of admirers). The second rabbi to appear in Lublin after the liberation was Ovadia Farbiazesz, who was also a ritual slaughterer and an expert kosher examiner. He stayed on in Lublin and bestowed the benefits of kosher meat on the local Jews.

To recall, the Central Committee of Polish Jews was established in November 1944. As a matter of fact, a provisional Jewish committee was organized immediately after liberation; it would enter an area immediately after the German withdrawal and begin extending first aid to survivors, registering them, and searching for relatives. The new committee, established in November and headed by Dr. Zommerstein, also began forming ties with the Jewish world abroad.

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The Central Committee was assembled according to party key and its composition reflected compromise and reconciliation: Dr. Zommerstein, chairman; Dr. D. Gelber, secretary; Dr. Hirschhorn (Bund); Kosover, Zonstein (Zionist "Ihud"); M. Bitter, B. Alf, F. Zelicki (Communists, PPR). In January 1945, after the liberation of Warsaw, A. Berman and A. Zukerman arrived in Lublin and were coopted immediately onto the Central Committee of Polish Jews.

The first to join the Central Committee and to take part in the reconstruction effort were the Jews who decided to stay in the country, to throw in their lot with the new Poland; these were mostly members of the PPR and other leftist groups. But there were also other Jews who just waited for a chance to emigrate, including those who dreamed about emigration to the Land of Israel.

From the very beginning a dispute broke out about the fate of the surviving Jewish remnant in Poland. At that time, however, the grim, tragic memories of the Holocaust were still strong enough to override the internal divisions, despite sharp differences of opinion among different groups. The Central Committee was, after all, preoccupied with the pressing concerns of the time, the most urgent of these being to help the survivors with food, clothing, housing and the like.

At about that time the first signs of unrest appeared in the country; politically motivated murders were committed, and individuals and groups attacked. The newly established agencies of the regime were practically powerless, some of them even indifferent. The majority of the Polish population stood in opposition to the new regime, which began building the new Poland along the lines of the Soviet model.

Despite the serious and pressing concerns occupying the minds of members of the Central Committee, I endeavored to establish ties with some of them in the hiope of drawing their attention to the problems of observant Jews. The minyan of Beth Peretz continued to assemble daily and Jews asked for prayerbooks, philacteries and prayer shawls, for, as they put it, "one does not live by bread alone." Unfortunately, my pleas fell on deaf ears; no one evinced any interest in religious

needs. Together with Rabbi Yosef Atlas, a former Mizrahi worker, and several other Jews (I forgot their names), we began rummaging in the building of the famous Yeshiva of Lublin Sages. In one of the cellars we found a number of holy books, prayerbooks, Pentateuchs, a few Talmud volumes, and torn parchments of desecrated Torah scrolls. We transferred the whole lot to the Central Committee building where, with visible displeasure, we were allocated a corner next to the bathrooms as a storage place for our treasure. Rabbi Yosef Atlas took upon himself the task of supervising the distribution of holy articles; however, he was evicted from there at a later time.

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I did not want to bother Dr. Zommerstein with these questions. I knew full well how delicate his position was, what an intricate balancing act this well-known Zionist activist had to perform after coming here straight from Moscow and having endured the ordeal of Soviet prisons. He had foreseen the difficulties and acted according to his conscience. To have a complete picture of the man we must also take into account his exhaustion, sickness and dejection. All in all, I realized that the Central Committee would not be of much help to us observant Jews. We had no choice but to rebuild our religious world with our own hands.

On the Front with the Jewish Soldier

From January to May 1945

By December 20, my enlistment procedures had been completed, but I was prevented from travelling to Lvov to bring my wife and the children

to Lublin. As Chief Rabbi I was obliged to set out for the front right away to stand at the side of the Jewish soldiers fighting in the ranks of the Polish army. I didn't even have enough time to organize the army rabbinate staff properly.

I shall not dwell here on my activities as Chief Rabbi of the Polish army from December 1944 until the end of 1949. I hope to relate this interesting story at a later time.

My main focus in these pages is on the attempts to recreate Jewish religious communities in postwar Poland. However, as an exception, I would like to describe some of the most interesting episodes and developments from the period January-May 1945, the last five months of the war. My account should throw a special light on the relations between Jews and Poles in that period.

My first public appearance as Chief Rabbi of the Polish army took place in Lublin on December 29, 1944, in the large hall of the High Command of the city of Lublin. The gathering was attended by several hundred soldiers and officers of the First Division, named after Polish national hero Tadeusz Kosciuszko. The hall was festooned in Polish national colors together with a white banner with the Star of David on it, hung above the main table. The High Command did not allow us to use the white and blue banner.

The evening commenced with a solemn evening prayer and ended with a memorial service for the six million martyrs, followed by a military rollcall in memory of the Jewish soldiers who died in combat on all fronts from Lenino to Lublin. The prayers and memorial services were led by my army cantor, Simcha Rotfeld. The General Staff was

represented by General Piotrkowski, chief of the Army Organization.

In what follows I quote a passage from my first solemn sermon as Chief Rabbi of the Polish army:

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"At this moment, when the Jewish soldier serving in the Polish Army stands before his God and pours out his heart to Him; the moment when the Polish Army Rabbinate makes its first official appearance in the liberated city of Lublin, after five years of Nazi occupation with its atrocities and slavery; this moment is counted as a milestone in the history of Polish Jewry. Upholding the traditions of Judaism, the Chief Rabbinate of the Jewish religion resumes its activity on liberated Polish soil; the soil where the Jew was barred from venturing outdoors, where German savagery sought not only to exterminate the Jews, but also to erase all traces of their existence, all of their most cherished treasures. In accordance with the traditions of our ancestors and in recognition of the importance of this moment, let us first thank the Master of the World for bringing us hither: Blessed art Thou O Lord our God, King of the Universe, who has kept us alive and sustained us to reach this present time.

Thanks be to You, True Judge, for affording us Jews, the most tormented and martyred people of all the European nations, to reach the moment of settling scores, when justice and righteousness can finally sit in judgement over the Nazi monster....

...In those tragic days of September 1939, over 36,000 Polish Jews, soldiers and officers in the Polish army, fell on the battlefield, fighting the most deadly foe that humanity had ever known.

Sixty-one thousand Polish Jews, soldiers and officers in the Polish army, were taken prisoner by the enemy; they lost their liberty, health and also their lives. Jewish soldiers from all army branches--infantry, artillery, the engineering corps, signal corps, medical corps and others--fought shoulder to shoulder with their Polish comrades-in-arms in the battle of Kutno, on the fortifications of Warsaw, at Modlyn, in Gdynia and defending Westerplatte. And when finally the regular army succumbed to the overwhelming superiority of the enemy, when Warsaw, mortally wounded, was rolling in its blood, delivered into the clutches of the victorious swastika, the first groups of partisans began forming in the forests and the countryside. Polish Jews joined the partisan struggle.

The future chronicler of the post-September resistance will hardly overlook the revolt of 400 Polish and Jewish prisoners at the labor camp near Pszasnicz at the end of 1939. In the course of time this revolt became a popular legend known as "the Przasnicz revolt." Next to the name of the Pole Langiewicz, who first put forth the idea of revolt, the future historian will have to record the name of a Jewish blacksmith, Moshe Melk, who was the first to grab the rifle

of a German sentry and blazed the trail for freedom of his mates in trouble.

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Similarly, the future historian of the partisan movement in the Lukow district will not be able to overlook the part of a Jewish gardener, Izyk Feingold, who fell, weapon in hand, during heavy shelling and combat with the enemy at Pilsudski Sqaure in Lukow. His blood mingled with the blood of three Polish heroes from Lukow, the Strzelecki brothers."

It is estimated that from 1939 to the end of World War II, some 160,000 Jewish soldiers fought in the ranks of the Polish army. The number of Jews in the 1st Army named after Kosciuszko, which was formed in the Soviet Union, reached 12,000. Altogether some 36,000 Jewish soldiers died fighting on all fronts in the ranks of the Polish army. Unfortunately, they will remain anonymous; their names, numbers, struggle, heroism and death in battle will not be recorded in the annals of Polish history.

Casualty figures of Jewish soldiers were supplied to me by the Manpower Division of the General Staff in Lublin. At the Division's Statistics Department they drew my attention to the fact that although the figures were more or less accurate, they were based on ongoing inquiries and temporary statistical findings. As far as partisans were concerned, I quoted two names only as examples. It is to be borne in mind, however, that thousands of Jewish partisans were active in nearly all of the following partisan formations:

1. Home Army, or AK (Armia Krajowa); the military arm of the Polish

Government-in-Exile in London;

2. People's Army, or AL (Armia Ludowa); mostly Communist;

3. National Armed Forces, or NSZ (Narodowe Sily Zbrojne); an extreme nationalistic-fascist group;

4. Freedom and Independence, or WiN (Wolnosc i Niepodleglosc); an extreme fascist formation, active mostly in the forests;

5. Ukrainian Insurrectionary Army, or UPA (Ukrainska Powstancza Armia); only a handful of Jews, mostly craftsmen and physicians, belonged to this formation.

Bitter was the fate of Jewish partisans in almost every partisan formation. Having arrived at a partisan unit, a would-be Jewish fighter hoped he would finally regain some peace of mind; after the unspeakable torments of Nazi rule, he would no longer have to fear for his life, would be able to live as an equal among equals, and fight the Nazi beast in open battle, weapon in hand. Unfortunately, in most cases he suffered disappointment. He was not always accepted as one of the company, suffered from the anti-Semitism of his comrades-in-arms, and his life was not always safe.

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In the first days of January 1945, I began touring the war fronts in a Soviet ZIS automobile driven by a Jewish soldier, a tank driver in the regular Polish army. His name was Itzhak Milverger and he was a gay and warm-hearted fellow. The army cantor, Simha Rotfeld, accompanied me everywhere. In the meantime Warsaw was liberated and the General Staff moved to Wolochy, a small town not far from Warsaw. The capital itself presented a dreadful sight; nothing but rubble. As for my family, I had

first brought my wife and the children from Lvov to Lublin and from Lublin to Wolochy.

I spent the period between January and May 1945 mostly in military hospitals, with occasional visits to Wolochy where my temporary home was located, or to the Warsaw suburb of Praga which somehow emerged from the war almost unscathed. At that time the Polish army formed part of a large Soviet formation and our sector, extending from the Baltic Sea to the Czechoslovak border, was called the Ukrainian-Belorussian Front, commanded by General Rokossovsky. The Polish army consisted of three divisions:

1. The 1st Division named after Tadeusz Kosciuszko;
2. The 2nd Division named after Karol Swierszczewski;
3. The 3rd Division named after Traugutt.

The total number of Jewish soldiers in the three divisions exceeded 15,000.

As mentioned earlier, the lion's share of my time at the front was devoted to visiting wounded Jewish soldiers in military hospitals; there were also improvised field hospitals set up hastily just behind the lines. In May 1945, these lines moved very fast; our victories followed in quick succession as the enemy kept reatreating. The seriously wounded were transferred from the improvised field hospitals to regular and orderly hospitals in Bydgoszcz and its environs. The convalescents were brought to Otwock and other holiday places in the vicinity.

Wounded Jewish soldiers did not fare well in those hospitals. They were lonely, isolated, without relatives or family, who had perished in

the Holocaust. They did receive good medical attention, but their fellow patients had nothing for them but contempt and mockery. If a Jewish patient happened to look characteristically Jewish, he would be called Yoyne (a corrupted version of the name Yona, which in Polish sounds derisive and mocking). This name was used in all three Polish army divisions.

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I must note that officers of all ranks in all units were fighting these manifestations of anti-Semitism among their subordinates. They tackled this issue head-on and with all due seriousness. However, the zoological hatred harbored by Polish rank-and-file soldiers toward the Jews remained immune to lectures and information campaigns mounted in army batallions; nor was this attitude affected in any way by the knowledge of millions of Jewish lives destroyed by the common Nazi enemy. The ordinary Polish soldier treated his Jewish comrade-in-arms with unconcealed contempt and derision. He knew from his own experience that the life and property of the Jew were free game; he could be shot without being brought to account. Polish soldiers had seen this and could draw the obvious conclusions.

At the same time, however, it was common knowledge in all three divisions that the Jewish soldier was an excellent fighte--daring, always up front, always volunteering for dangerous missions at the front. I heard these opinions often from commanders in all units. The reason for this was not hard to fathom: the Jewish soldier knew whom he was fighting and for what cause. It was perfectly clear to him that he was fighting the greatest enemy of the Jews of all time, the enemy who

had murdered his parents, his brothers and sisters, his relatives, his wife and children. The Jew enlisted willingly and fought in line with the longstanding Polish-Jewish motto: "For our freedom and yours." At one time this motto served as a beacon for Jewish soldiers fighting shoulder to shoulder with Poles for the liberation of the country. This time, however, the Jewish soldier could not hope for much at his release; no home was waiting for him, no family, no shelter.

Most of the Jewish soldiers in all three divisions were young refugees who had succeeded in fleeing from Poland to the Soviet Union where they enlisted in the new Polish army. They hoped that they would thereby be able to return home and reunite with their families after the war. Everyone knew about what was going on in Poland, but no one suspected the enormity of the destruction. Their only comfort was in the hope that once the war was over, they would be able to escape and somehow reach the Land of Israel.

These, in broad outline, were my impressions from conversations with wounded Jewish soldiers from January to May 1945.

I spent long hours sitting by the bedside of the seriously wounded, whereas I assembled the convalescents in the reading room of the hospital. The accounts of their experiences from the outbreak of the war until the encounter with the bullet which sent them to this hospital were nothing short of a fictional story of incredible suspense. My presence as Chief Rabbi comforted and encouraged the hospitalized Jewish soldiers; on Saturdays I read to them the weekly portion from the Pentateuch, and the Haftorah (a chapter from the Prophets). I also told them about the attempts of Jews to rebuild their

lives in liberated Poland.

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Some of the wounded soldiers asked for prayerbooks, philacteries, prayer shawls, and Bibles. I was grieved to the bottom of my heart that I was unable to meet these justified requests. At that time my contacts with Jews from free countries were very limited and their help consisted mainly of shipments of food and clothing. Some of the hospitalized Jewish soldiers requested kosher food. All these requests had little chance of being met; the Central Committee of Polish Jews was dominated by people with extreme left-wing views and the notion of ritual articles had no meaning for them whatsoever.

My visits to the Jewish fighters at the front were of a different character. These men were completely absorbed by the task of fighting the Nazi beast. Their main concern was not to miss, God forbid, even one battle, not to miss an opportunity of a dangerous mission, such as penetration of the advance lines of the enemy with the purpose of taking some German soldiers prisoner and bringing them back for interrogation. On seeing me, there was no end to the exclamations: "What? There are still Jews living there? Jews are getting organized? Perhaps someone of my family is alive?" Their happiness over our meeting knew no bounds. Every time I visited the front, I brought with me the list of Jews known to have survived, and brought back long lists of Jewish soldiers fighting at the front.

Assuring that the Jewish fallen would get a Jewish funeral was the most pressing, sad and even heart-rending problem. The maddening, mind-boggling pace of war developments did not leave much place for

emotions. Fallen soldiers were buried in mass graves in the field, Poles and Jews together. In all three divisions they would stick a cross in the mound on top of the grave and underneath it place a little plank with the names of the dead soldiers. Whenever there was some time to spare and the unit happened to pass by a village or a small town with a Catholic cemetery, the fallen were buried there, again Poles and Jews together. Occasionally, the comrades of the fallen Jewish soldier resisted the common burial and insisted on a separate grave. They would then place a semblance of a tombstone on it, inscribed with the Star of David and the name of the dead soldier in Hebrew letters. However, a lonely Jewish grave usually did not last long. There were always villains who could not stand the disgrace of a Jew lying in the sacred soil of a Catholic cemetery. On many occasions the tombstone was pulled down and the grave mound scattered, even defiled.

How can a human heart contain so much evil and depravity! After all, the Jewish soldier had fought shoulder to shoulder with his Polish comrades for the sake of a free and independent Poland, for your freedom and ours. Wasn't it enough for you to witness the systematic extermination of millions of Polish Jews? And now, when the Jewish soldier spills his blood for your cause, you keep persecuting him, even in his grave?

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I decided to bring this whole matter to the attention of General Poplawski, the commander of all three divisions. I submitted to him a detailed memorandum, listing three such incidents of defilement of graves. During our conversation I sensed that he understood our

national sensibilities and was ashamed that there were still Poles who could do such a thing. But, he said, there was hardly anything he could do to rectify this wrong because according to Soviet army orders concerning burials, all soldiers were to be interred in a common grave. "Here at the front," said General Poplawski, "we are bound by Soviet military regulations, which do not concern themselves with religious sensibilities." At the same time, however, General Poplawski was a sensitive enough man to appreciate our concern over offending the feelings of the remnants of Polish Jewry. He therefore decided to sumbit this matter to the General Staff in Wolochy. Chief of the General Staff was General Wladyslaw Korczyc, who was rumored to be Jewish. In any case, he approched the matter with all due gravity and issued the following directive to all three divisions:

> Should a Jewish soldier fall in combat in one of our sectors, and should his comrades request a separate burial for him, the request is to be fulfilled. In this case a wooden board will be placed atop the grave, instead of the cross, bearing the name of the dead soldier, the relevant dates, but without the Star of David.

On this occasion General Korczyc conversed with me for a considerable period of time about the atrocities perpetrated by the Nazis in Poland. He also wanted to hear about anti-Semitism in the Polish army and intimated that the situation in the Red Army in this respect was not much better.

I took my leave with mixed feelings, as I was not sure whether the directive would be complied with. Besides, not in every case would

there be a Jewish soldier on hand with enough courage to demand a Jewish burial for his fallen comrade. I also knew of a large number of Jewish officers passing as Christians and even adopting Christian ways. Under such conditions, who was to request a Jewish funeral? I was also aware that in the heat of victorious battles, such directives were brushed aside as a matter of course, as there were always more important things requiring sometimes split-second decisions.

Shortly before the Purim festival of 1945, I returned from the front and remained in Wolochy until Passover. For the first time I was able to celebrate Purim at home with my wife and children as a free man. Our joy, however, was tempered by intense grief: not one from our families had survived the Holocaust. Everyone had died.

Warsaw was a sea of rubble and the surviving Jewish remnant was concentrated in the suburb of Praga. All Praga synagogues had been destroyed and no permanent house of prayer existed in the suburb. Nobody cared about this state of affairs, nor was anyone concerned with remedying it. After long searches and enormous efforts I managed to squeeze a proper place for worship from the Municipal Housing Department. The Housing Department placed at our disposal a suite of

six rooms at 64 Targowa St. I made the necessary adaptations in the apartment to make it serviceable as a house of prayer. Resorting to all kinds of ploys, I also procured an apartment for a rabbi who was to live in Praga. After a long search I managed to find an appropriate candidate and brought him to Praga to serve both as a rabbi and ritual slaughterer. It was Rabbi Horowitz, a former rabbi of Zloty Potok, a

township in eastern Galicia.

Rabbi Horowitz moved into his new quarters and began his duties as the first official rabbi and ritual slaughterer in liberated Praga. He was a sterling character and a wonderful rabbinic personality; before long the few observant Jews in Praga began gathering around him.

On February 10, 1945, the first circular letter was issued in which rules for Jewish religious life in Poland were listed. An official community was established ("Communal Association" as they put it), which began gathering Torah scrolls, prayerbooks, phylacteries, prayer shawls and other religious articles; it also attended to matters of kashruth. Rabbi Horowitz was slaughtering chickens himself in the corner of the courtyard at 64 Targowa St. Cattle could be slaughtered only in the municipal slaughterhouse and this is where the trouble started. The anti-Semitically disposed municipal management apparently did not forget the shameful debate over ritual slaughter led by Diet deputy Prystorowa from the podium of the Polish parliament before the war. Rabbi Horowitz was simply barred from entering the slaughterhouse.

Only after the intervention of Dr. Zommerstein did we succeed in overriding the malicious refusal of the municipal management. It must be borne in mind that all that was involved was one cow per week. However, we believed that for the first Passover Seder we would need a larger quantity of meat; we expected not only Jewish soldiers to attend, but also scores of Jews who kept streaming into Warsaw without respite.

Two persons deserve full credit for organizing the Jewish community in Praga, which later moved to Warsaw itself: the chairman of the

community, Degnstein, and his deputy, Judelewicz. Their activities were regulated by instructions spelled out in a circular letter issued by the Provisional Polish Government. The text of the letter is as follows:

Ministry of Public Administration

Department of Religious Denominations

No. 911/45 February 10, 1945

Circular

Concerning provisional organization of religious affairs for the Jewish population.

To: Citizens Voivodes [province governors].

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The Ministry of Public Administration is promulgating this circular in view of the need to organize the religious affairs of the Jewish population within the boundaries of the Republic. Citizens Voivodes are hereby requested to pass on its contents to Citizens Starostas [district governors] subordinate to them, for the immediate implementation of its directives.

1. There is no intention of establishing Israelite religious communities, in the format laid out in the decree of the President of October 14, 1927, and the regulations set forth in the decree issued by the Minister of Religions and Education of April 5, 1928 (Official Gazette, No. 52, paragraph 508).

2. All the real estate and moveable property left after the dissolution of the religious communities will, for the time being, remain in the

custody of the state authorities, until the promulgation of regulations concerning abandoned property. This property is to serve, first of all, the activities of Jewish charities, cultural and other societies.

3. In order to enable citizens of Jewish faith to freely observe their religious rituals in accordance with paragraph 111 of the Constitution of the State, groups of no less than ten citizens of this faith are allowed to establish Jewish religious associations for the purpose of organizing, upholding and carrying out ceremonies and customs of Jewish religious rituals, as well as for the purpose of dispensing religious education. Only one such Jewish religious association can be established in any area.

4. Each Jewish religious association will be headed by a board of directors, as follows:

a) In religious associations of less than 100 members - 5 directors.

b) In religious associations of more than 100 members - 11 directors

5. The Starosta in charge will confirm the chairman of the association and his deputies who were elected by the board. The officiating rabbi will be a member of the communal board automatically.

6. A provisional religious council composed of three rabbis to be appointed by the Ministry of Public Administration is hereby established as a professional body deciding on Jewish religious and ritual affairs. The provisional religious council is entitled to submit proposals and suggestions concerning the religious life of Jews.

7. Jewish religious associations will propose candidates for the posts of rabbis and religious judges to the supreme religious council. The Minister of Public Administration confirms the candidates in accordance

with the recommendations of the religious council.

8. In order to enable the Jewish religious associations to perform the functions listed in paragraph 7 of this circular, the Starostas are hereby required to deliver to the care of the board of the local association all the real estate which in the past belonged to the religious Israelite communities, such as synagogues, religious seminars (yeshivoth), ritual baths, cemeteries, as well as religious articles such as Torah scrolls, Talmud volumes, etc.

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9. In places where no articles can be found which would serve exclusively for Jewish religious purposes, but other articles are to be found which hitherto belonged to the local religious community, the Starostas are required, to the extent possible, to enable Jews to use them, so as to enable them to carry on these activities.

10. The matter of cemeteries will be resolved by means of a special directive. Until then Jewish cemeteries will remain in the custody of Jewish religious associations, on the condition that they will not trade in cemetery lots. They are also forbidden to refuse burial of a person of Jewish faith, regardless of reasons.

11. Religious associations are allowed to receive fees for the following services: a) circumcision; b) wedding; c) burial and tombstones.

12. With the promulgation of the new directives, the rabbis confirmed by the Ministry of Public Administration are required to keep records of births, marriages and deaths.

Minister of Public Administration

Jozef Maslanko (--)

For the knowledge of: Voivodes (all)
Superintendent of the Ministry of Public Administration.

Passover of 1945 in Praga

Baking Passover matzoth in Praga those days was easier said than done. There was no special stove for baking matzoth, no skilled bakers qualified to do the job, no special utensils or other equipment required by Jewish law.

Meanwhile the guns kept roaring and bombs occasionally fell on Warsaw and its environs. The handful of survivors were still behaving as stunned and anguished mourners. However, as the saying goes, where there's a will, there's a way. M. Kosover, one of the leaders of the Zionist Ihud, found us a special bakery for baking matzoth; it was not located in Praga but in the small town of Radzymin, near Warsaw. Miraculously, all the utensils needed for baking matzoth had been preserved there.

Together with Rabbi Horowitz and several other Jews of the Praga community we set out for Radzymin. We found the bakery, cleaned the stove and the utensils, and made everything kosher. Bakers were found and, with God's help, we settled down to baking matzoth. As we could not make flour from shamur grain (grain protected against damp since reaping) from a kosher flower mill, we used regular flour which we obtained from the Army Command on orders of General Korczyc of the General Staff.

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I prepared the Seder and the days of the Festival for Jewish soldiers in Praga and its environs. M. Kosover helped me set up a kosher restaurant in Praga so that Jews had somewhere to go.

I conducted the first Seder in a large hall in Praga attended by almost all the Jewish soldiers stationed there. Many civilians were also present including Bundists headed by Dr. Hirshhorn. He was still in uniform, with the rank of major, and held the post of mediator between the government and the Jewish population. Later, with the consolidation of the Central Committee of Polish Jews and its official recognition by the authorities, Dr. Hirshhorn was dismissed.

At that time the Bund was part of the Central Committee of Polish Jews and its position was assured thanks to the support of Prime Minister, Osobka Morawski, who repreented the Polish Socialist Party (or PPS--its Polish acronym) in the Government; the PPS had always maintained good relations with the Bund. Later Bund members were removed from the Central Committee and began leaving Poland slowly and in secret.

Dr. Zommerstein was due to attend the Seder and deliver a keynote address. Unfortunately, he had taken ill and since then subsequently hardly ever left his home after dark. This Seder was the first Seder in freedom, after five years of enslavement, death and destruction. The hall was packed to overflowing with people; many stood in the hallways and outdoors.

I succeeded in bringing eleven Passover Haggadoth; together with cantor Rotfeld we read the Haggada aloud so that all the assembled

could hear it. Soldiers and officers of the Red Army were also among those present. Even today I have no idea how they had learned of the kosher Passover Seder being conducted that night in Praga.

After the festive meal of the Seder, speeches were delivered. Every word uttered that night was infused with joy and hope; the Nazis failed to break us and the Jewish people looked toward the future with pride and hope, particularly toward the Land of Israel. Needless to say, some speakers expressed their desire to remain in Poland and to help ~~with~~ rebuild a new Poland free of anti-Semitism. Despite this mild discord, the prevailing atmosphere was calm with everyone in a festive holiday mood.

After the speeches it was time for singing together. The assembled Jews sang songs in Yiddish, Hebrew, Russian and Polish. A dispute ensued after some Jews demanded that only songs in Yiddish and Hebrew be sung at the Seder table, but the dispute did not dispel the festive mood. The singing and dancing lasted till dawn; it seemed to articulate the strong resolution of the people: the Jewish people live! We are here!

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The presence of Red Army soldiers and officers nearly led to serious trouble. Apparently someone had informed "the right persons" and I was accused of conducting religious propaganda among Red Army personnel. Nothing could be further from the truth, of course. They heard about the event and came of their own accord because they were drawn to their fellow Jews on this holiday. This, of course, did not persuade the "right persons"; a great deal of labor and effort went into repenting for this "sin."

Great days in Berlin

Immediately after Passover ended, I left for the front and joined the Kosciuszko Division. At the end of April 1945, I was in a Berlin suburb and a few days later, in early May, I arrived in the city itself, near the Tiergarten. Thus it was fated that I should see the ultimate defeat of Hitler with my own eyes.

By May 7, all units of the German army had practically surrendered. Two days later, in the morning, Fieldmarshal Keitl signed the surrender agreement on behalf of the German army. Nazi Germany admitted its total defeat.

The next day, May 10, 1945, a big, festive parade took place at the Brandenburg Gate. All senior officers who had commanded units in the battle for Berlin, assembled on the stairs of the statue of Friedrich Wilhelm and the surrounding square. They watched the procession of German POWs who went past, their heads bowed. Nazi Germany lay in ruins. Thus the words of the Psalmist had come true: "O Lord God, to whom vengeance belongeth; O God, to whom vengeance belongeth, show thyself. Lift up thyself, thou judge of the earth: render a reward to the proud." (Psalms 94:1-2). There were no words to express our joy and satisfaction on that day; but millions of Jews did not live to see it.

In the general commotion I suddenly espied a group of Red Army soldiers who kept looking around curiously as if searching for something. I stood with a group of Jewish army officers; we spoke Polish and Yiddish. Someone produced a bottle of liquor; we drank, toasting the victory. Everyone among us stressed that we were the true

guests of honor at this celebration. Then the Soviet soldiers drew near us and, having heard our conversation in Yiddish, joined us and drank l'haim with us. Within a few minutes I could swear that all those gathered together in our group near the Brandenburg Gate were old pals, relatives, family even. Already then, at the first meeting between us, Polish Jews and the Jewish soldiers of the Red Army, we saw that the Jewish spark, the interest in Jews and Jewry, was alive in the hearts of the Russian Jews.

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After the parade we began looking for Jews in Berlin by asking frightened German passers-by whom we came across here and there in the streets. One of them told us that he had heard about Jews still alive in the former Jewish hospital at 52 Iranischestrasse. We took him with us as a guide. His information turned out to be true; we found a handful of survivors there. The inevitable question emerged: who were they and by what miracle had they survived?

We were greeted by an elderly man who introduced himself as Dr. Lustig, or, in his full title, Ober Medizinalrat. He had been the chairman of the Reichsvereinigung der Deutschen Juden (Federal Union of German Jews). He told us that the German authorities had concentrated several categories of Jews in various German cities: 1) full Jews; 2) privileged Jews (Geltungs-Juden); 3) protected Jews (Shutzjuden). In 1943 the hospital building had been converted into a shelter for these Jews. Currently over 3,000 persons lived there; about 100 real Jews and the rest of mixed blood (Mischlingen). They had been living in the hospital building as in a sealed ghetto and were barred from leaving

it. Even they had not been immune from deportations. According to Dr. Lustig similar shelters existed in five other German cities: Frankfurt am Mein, Hamburg, Breslau, Koeln and Munich.

One incident is well worth mentioning. In June 1943, persons of mixed blood throughout Germany decided to form a special association of mixed Jews. The Gestapo did not permit such an organization, and what's more, by ruse it came into possession of the names, addresses and other data about the prospective members.

In the hospital I met with two religious Jews: Neumann and Arenstein. They told me a little about life in the ghetto cum shelter. The story was grim: hunger, privation, torments and, now and then, deportation.

The next day, May 11, I assembled all these Jews in a large, spacious hall and brought them the tidings of liberation. In doing this I planted some seeds of life and hope in their hearts. I spent the whole day in their company. Many of them asked to speak to me in private. They related their grim stories of the nightmare of being a Mischlinge in Nazi Germany: people without firm ground under their feet, without roots. Each story began with the same question: "Who am I, after all? A Jew or a German? Whom should I turn to? How shall I go about rebuilding my life under the new circumstances?" These Mischlingen appeared to live in the grip of inconsolable dejection. As it is written: "The fathers have eaten sour grapes and the children's teeth are set on edge" (children are punished for parents' sins) (Jer. 31:29).

I spent only a few days in Berlin and on May 12, 1945, I returned to Warsaw. It was another month before I moved from Wolochy to Warsaw, to 16 Szucha St., a spacious, seven-story building. In one wing lived senior government officials, and in the second wing, officers of the General Staff. The building was under strict guard and all visitors had to present a special pass; the fear of attack was very much alive.

Organizing the Communities--the First Steps

As the curtain was drawn over the horrific spectacle of World War II, the time had come to devote all my spare time to the revival of Jewish communities in Poland. Although the Polish Government in its circular had set very narrow limits to our activities, we nonetheless believed that with good will, with the help of good people, it would be possible to gather the scattered remnants, organize them, bring them back to the fold of Judaism, and rebuild Jewish life on the ruins of the destroyed communities. As for those who sought a way out of Poland, we could endeavor to help them with emigration.

In the summer of 1945 we knew full well that a considerable proportion of the Jewish survivors would emigrate. At the same time, however, we were certain that some of the survivors, both from among those already in Poland and among the repatriates still due to return from the Soviet Union, would stay in the country. We drew encouragement from the good will of the democratic Polish government in those days toward the handful of Jewish survivors. Also, we were influenced by a consideration I myself heard many times from the survivors: "I am tired of life and of unceasing torments; I just can't hit the road again. The

Land of Israel is closed and there is no chance I can get a certificate (of immigration to Israel). Where should I go then? It's better for me to stay here."

At that time I published the first manifesto to the surviving remnant in Poland. Its text follows:

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To our brethren, children of Israel in Poland!

The Department of Religious Affairs of the Ministry of Public Administration has issued circular no. 11, dealing with the regulation of the religious life of Jews in Poland. The circular was addressed to all provincial governors. This document provides for the establishment of Jewish religious communities throughout the country. These communities are to be assigned the tasks of organizing, restoring and maintaining Jewish religious life in the country, sustaining Jewish tradition and Jewish morality, and attending to the needs of religious education for the younger generation.

For six years packs of savage Germans tortured and persecuted the Jewish people, erased almost all traces of Jewish life in Poland, destroyed and burned all our holy things, defiled the graves and tombstones of our ancestors, of gaonim and great rabbis. Millions of Jews underwent most gruesome tortures, were burned, asphyxated in gas chambers, and buried alive. But the Eternal Glory of Israel will not fail. The Holy One, Blessed be He, will not abandon us. We have lived to see Hitler's defeat. With the might of the victorious Red Army, assisted by the heroic Polish army, we have been liberated from the nightmare, from the German Amaleks who spilled the blood of millions of

unfortunate Jews.

Now we are facing a new life in a new, democratic and independent Poland. The great disaster inflicted upon us must not break our spirits or weaken our resolution. This tragedy, without precedent in world history, must not, God forbid, undermine our sense of purpose or our faith.

Each one of us, who during the occupation more than once stared death in the eye, had an opportunity to experience the Lord's mercy. Divine providence and justice watched over every Jew who by miracle escaped the hands of the murderers.

"It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not" (Lam. 3;22). The Holy One, Blessed be He, has not departed from us and will not depart in the future. Let us then shake off the grip of the nightmare of the past, overcome our psychological fatigue and our apathy. Let new hope and strength shine forth, let that faith infuse our spirits and illuminate our new venture in the new Poland.

The state institutions have promised that they would not restrict our religious liberties. On the contrary, they expressed a willingness to extend all possible assistance in restoring our religious existence. The new, democratic Poland does not discriminate between its citizens, or between one religion and another. The circular states, among other things, that every Starosta is required to restore immediately to each newly-established religious community all buildings originally designated for religious purposes: synagogues, study houses, yeshivoth, religious schools, etc., which had served Jewish communities before the

war.

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Our most vital task at present is to plunge with vigor into the organizational work of establishing religious communities wherever there is a Jewish public. We must return to the age-old source of true Jewish culture, to the Holy Scriptures; we must return to our teachings, our traditions, our morality, our language, our people. An enthusiastic work of restoration will bring back the glory of our ravished spiritual and cultural treasures.

Remembering the holy and pure souls of our martyrs is not our only task; their memory will remain holy to us forever. We are also duty-bound to concern ourselves with the souls of survivors, left alone in the world, broken physically and mentally, who wander like a flock without a shepherd, collapsing under the weight of their dejection, whose heart goes out to other Jews, to a Jewish environment, public prayer, Jewish melody.

God forbid that we forget our youngest generation, thousands of children who survived the destruction by hiding in Christian homes; our orphans wandering without a roof over their heads; the youth which is our only hope. We are duty-bound to ensure that they will receive a religious education worthy of the name. In every community we must establish an educational institution for the young and administer religious instruction for adults. The above-mentioned circular states clearly that each and every religious community must apply itself diligently to the task of providing religious education to the younger generation.

Dear brethren!

We call upon each one of you, for whom Judaism and Jewish tradition remain dear and holy; we call upon each Jew who has not detached himself completely from the sources of Jewishness made remote by the years of destruction, and whose heart has retained a Jewish spirit; we call upon all those: help us in organizing religious communities. Do not sit idle saying "this is none of my business." Every one of us and all of us together must take part in the work of restoring Jewish religious life in Poland.

We call upon every Polish Jew in general and the handful of observant Jews in particular: contribute to the restoration of all religious institutions destroyed during the war; take interest and turn to us concerning rabbis. We shall spare no effort to bring back to Poland the handful of rabbis still in the Soviet Union.

Come and join us in multitudes!

Help us in restoring the Jewish community in Poland!

Signed by the Representation of Jewish Religious Communities in Poland:

Rabbi Dr. David Kahane

Rabbi Moshe Steinberg.

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The manifesto was published in the only Jewish newspaper which appeared in Poland at that time, Das Neue Lebn. I sent an exact Polish translation to the Department of Religious Affairs at the Ministry of Public Administration.

On May 17 the Ministry appointed me the representative of all

religious communities in Poland. I began searching for qualified persons to help me with my responsibilities.

The manifesto left a powerful impression on the Jewish population. At that time I visited nearly every Jewish settlement in Poland; my position as Chief Rabbi of the Polish army, my rank and means of transport placed at my disposal enabled me to visit all cities and towns where at least some number of Jews had settled after the liberation, including all concentrations of Jewish population in Lower Silesia. Everywhere I went I convened meetings, founded new communities, and ensured that the local Starosta accorded them official recognition as prescribed by law. By December 1945, there were 83 communities active throughout Poland.

In the course of time, rabbis began to appear; some of them had been in hiding in Poland, but the majority were among the repatriates from the Soviet Union. The first to appear was Rabbi Moshe Steinberg, a former rabbi of Brody, who came to Lvov as early as July 1944. He was subsequently appointed chief rabbi of Krakow. Rabbi Abraham-Isaskhar Engelard, son of the rabbi of Sosnowiec, who had spent the war as a partisan in the woods, returned to his patrimony in Sosnowiec. Rabbi Abraham Kravitz became the chief rabbi of the city of Lodz, whereas Rabbi Shalom Treisman settled in Wroclaw (Breslau) where he became that city's chief rabbi.

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Rabbis Who Officiated in Poland from 1945 to 1949

Rabbi Moshe Steinberg - Cracow; Rabbi Abraham Isahar Engelrad -

Sosnowce; Rabbi Abraham Kravitz - Lodz; Rabbi Shalom Treistman - Wroclaw; Rabbi Leiter - Gliwice; Rabbi Menashe Levertov - Cracow; Rabbi Shimon Efrati - Praga (suburb of Warsaw); Rabbi Itzhak Isaak Liebes - Bytom; Rabbi Akiba Groyss; Rabbi Shimon Frenkel - Podgorz and subsequently Cracow; Rabbi Nathan Trzaskala - Gdansk; Rabbi Shimon Gavel - Katowice; Rabbi Haim Kaner - Bialy-Kamien-Solica; Rabbi Elkana Zoberman - Walbrzych; Rabbi Zeev Morino - Lodz; Rabbi Roller - Lodz; Rabbi Shuster - Lodz; Rabbi Haim Grubner - Walbrzych; Rabbi Horowitz - Praga (suburb of Warsaw); Rabbi Obadia Farbiarz - Lublin.

We elected a Council of Rabbis in Poland, composed of this author as chairman, Rabbi Moshe Steinberg (Krakow), and Rabbi Kravitz (Lodz). This Council was granted official recognition as the Supreme Religious Council of Jews in Poland (Naczelna Rada Religijna Zydow w Polsce).

At the same time we approached several political parties in Poland to advise on the composition of the executive to head the 83 religious communities in the country. At a meeting attended by representatives of Mizrahi--the Torah and Labor movement, Agudath Israel and the block of General Zionists Igud, the following persons were elected to the Communities Committee: Rabbi David Kahane, Yosef Atlas, Pinchas Rafalowitz (all three from Mizrahi); Noah Adlist, Yehiel Granatstein, Yacov Hendel (from Agudath Israel); Leon Salpeter, a well-known Zionist worker in Krakow (representing Ihud). The three rabbis on the Council of Rabbis were automatically coopted onto the executive; in this way Rabbi Steinberg and Rabbi Krawitz also joined it. Thus the executive was composed of nine members.

The first plenary meeting of the executive was convened on November

25, 1945; this author was elected its chairman. Various spheres of activity were distributed among the members. Beginning on November 25, 1945, a Jewish religious organization began functioning in Poland; its official name was the Organizational Committee of Jewish Religious Congregations in Poland.

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Over a period of seven months, from May to November 1945, prodigious labor was invested in establishing the Council of Communities, and in strengthening and consolidating individual communities. Within this short time community workers worked wonders in building their communities. At the same time, however, the religious communities already began to encounter a clearly negative attitude on the part of the Central Committee of Jews in Poland, as well as local Jewish committees throughout the country.

In what follows I quote the full text of the first report issued by the Council of Communities in Poland. It was made public in January 1946, at the end of the first phase of its activity.

Report on the activities of the Committee of Jewish Religious Congregations in Poland

The surviving Polish Jews set about rebuilding their lives immediately after the liberation of Lublin in 1944. At first, people searched for relatives, whereas those without any relatives left alive looked for guardians. The survivors gave each other whatever form of support they could provide; those with sufficient funds rendered material assistance, others provided spiritual nourishment. Before long the handful of survivors were bound to each other with ties of friendship and fraternity, which made them feel as belonging to the same family.

Shortly after the liberation of Warsaw hundreds of orphaned, lonely and worn-out Jews set off for Lublin in the hope of finding material and moral support among their local brethren. The Central Committee of Jews in Poland was set up, assuming the task of representing the entire surviving remnant before the authorities regardless of social position and views. Unfortunately, it failed to acquit itself of this task; within a short time all matters pertaining to Jewish religion and tradition were placed outside the province of the Central Committee's activities. As a result, most of the observant Jews, who had reaffirmed and strengthened their Jewishness during the years of grief and destruction, were overcome with powerful longings for a true Jewish environment and for a Jewish Sabbath, and began organizing themselves as a separate collectivity. These efforts were accorded official approval and gained assistance from governmental circles who were interested in restoration of the social, cultural and religious life of

the Jews in the familiar form of the kehilla (legally incorporated religious community).

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The Kehilla is an important institution which has been in existence for nearly a thousand years; in Europe, in general, and in Poland, in particular it symbolized Jewish autonomy and euqality of rights; it has been holding together and nurturing the Jewish organic form of collective life in Exile.

Certain Jewish circles tried, to the best of their ability, to restrict the rights of jurisdiction exercised by the kehilla, by attempting to confine it to the narrow framework of a foremostly religious institution whose competencies did not extend beyond the graveyard, the house of worship, and the ritual purification baths. But not only was the broad range of the kehilla's ramified activities subjected to criticism; its very name had to be changed.

In this way the "Jewish Religious Association/Community" (Zydowskie Zrzeszenie Religijne in Polish) was set up in Poland; it was represented by the Organizational Committee of the Jewish Religious Association in Poland (Komitet Organizacyjny Zydowskiego Zrzeszenia Religijnego w Polsce). The Government granted its official recognition to this institution (here follows the text of the circular letter issued by the Ministry of Public Administration on February 10, 1945). In the letter of the Ministry of Public Administration, dated November 21, 1945, and addressed to the Organizational Committee of the Jewish Religious Associations in Poland, we find, inter alia:

The Ministry of Public Administration recognizes and approves

the establishment of the Organizational Committee of Jewish Religious Associations in the Republic of Poland, to be composed of the following: David Kahane - chairman; Yosef Atlas, Pinchas Rafalovitch, Noah Edelist, Yehiel Granatstein, Yaakov Hendel, Leon Salpeter, Rabbi Moshe Steinberg, Rabbi Abraham Kravitz - members.

The Committee is herewith charged with preparing a meeting of deputies of Jewish Religious Associations in Poland, which is to take place no later than one year from now. Until then the Organizational Committee will represent all the Jewish Religious Associations in Poland.

Thus established, the representative body of Jewish Religious Associations began expanding its authority in matters under its jurisdiction, with the approval of the Polish official authorities.

In a letter issued at a later time, the Ministry of Public Administration gave its approval to a new name for the Organizational Committee, which was to be called the Organizational Committee of Jewish Religious Congregations (Kehilloth).

Can anyone maintain that the Jewish religious community need not bother itself with the religious educational system, organizing soup kitchens for the poor and homeless, the welfare of the ill and needy, orphanages, homes for the elderly and other similar matters? Is it possible to claim that the Organizational Committee of Religious Congregations does not have the right to demand the return of holy articles and books which had been scattered throughout the country, and to salvage them? Isn't it our sacred duty to save orphaned Jewish

children from apostasy and complete assimilation, and to remove them from the hands of their Polish Christian guardians?

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That the Organizational Committee should concern itself with these matters is self-evident. Accordingly, we act with official approval, vigorously yet inconspicously, under difficult conditions but successfully. Our efforts have already produced tangible results. Today, after more than one year of work, we have already 83 kehilloth subordinated to the Organizational Committee and the Rabbinical Council in Warsaw. Hard work and individual devotion were needed to achieve this.

Members of the Organizational Committee are listed above. Michael Zilberberg serves as its general secretary, and Yosef Gorzyk as the second secretary. The Rabbinical Council is composed of the following: Rabbi Kahane - chairman; Rabbi Moshe Steinberg of Cracow, and Rabbi Abraham Kravits of Lodz.

The results of our broadly conceived and many-sided activities include the following:

1. Sixty kosher soup kitchens;
2. Forty Jewish schools which, in addition to religious instruction by melameds, teach also secular subjects by licensed teachers;
3. Two children homes, one in Zabrze and one in Geszcze Puste in Lower Silesia;
4. Two shelters for the elderly;
5. Twelve hostels;

6. Twelve rabbis officiating in larger cities, with official approval.

The state of houses of worship gives cause for serious concern. Most synagogues were laid waste by the Nazis or turned into warehouses and garages. It is a sacred duty of the kehilloth to undertake restoration of the destroyed synagogues.

Graveyards in particular present a grisly sight; some were simply erased from the face of the earth, others were damaged or neglected. We must erect fences around the remaining graveyards, cover the open graves of our dear ones, and carry out several exhumations of the victims of Nazi murderers.

Thousands of mass graves are scattered throughout the land; we are duty-bound to perform Jewish funeral rites for the anonymous martyrs buried in them. The kehillot have already accomplished a great deal in this area, but prodigious labor is still ahead of us. We are greatly hampered by lack of means, as exhumation of the graves involves considerable expenses.

The Organizational Committee in Warsaw has established a special department headed by Captain Yeshaya Drucker, entrusted with ransoming children. The commandment to redeem children is of particular importance these days, when only a handful of Jews remain in Poland, and every Jewish child uprooted from our midst, and facing assimilation or apostasy, is of crucial importance to us.

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The Organizational Committee in Warsaw has also set up the Museum Department headed by Michael Zilberberg. It has purchased important

articles; it also excavated from ruins and rubble precious holy vessels and all manner of emblems of martyrdom and suffering.

Our expenses have grown enormously with the repatriation of Jews from the Soviet Union.

The following are the sources of our revenues: the Relief Committee of the Chief Rabbi of the city of London, Dr. Shlomo Schoenfeld; JOINT; and donations of Jews from Poland. However, we must mention in particular the activity of Rabbi Schoenfeld of London who sends us shipments of food, clothing, religious articles, and extends help in ransoming children."

This report on the activities of the Organizational Committee of Jewish Religious Associations in Poland was printed and distributed in January 1946 among all communities in Poland.

The report underscores the approval and assistance extended by the official Polish authorities. The facts on the ground were somewhat different. As I have already indicated, at the outset of the negotiations the government officials had stressed that the legal activity of Jewish religious associations in Poland would not be conducted within the framework of the traditional kehilla before the war. This stipulation was even included in the first paragraph of the famous circular letter of the Ministry of Public Administration. In actual fact, however, we acted as if the kehilla charter of days gone by was still in force. It is to be noted in this context that in this we had the tacit approval of the Department of Religious Affairs.

From the distance of more than thirty-six years and on the basis of

my own observations and conversations with senior officials in those days, I can say that in general, Polish officials, i.e., Polish Communists (not Jews), from the very beginning did not display a favorable attitude to the Central Committee of Polish Jews. Nor were they favorably disposed to the large number of Jews in the governmental apparatus, some of whom included top officials. They looked askance at the Central Committee as a "state within the state." To a considerable extent this attitude stemmed from anti-Semitism, as well as from fear of the large number of Jews in the governmental apparatus. Not only the extreme right-wing, but Polish communists as well, could not reconcile themselves to the fact of so many Jews holding key posts in the government.

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Ransoming children

One of the most grave, important and tragic tasks which the Organizational Committee of Religious Congregations faced in those days was the commandment to ransom children; removing them from the custody of Christians and bringing them back to the Jewish fold.

In August 1942, while in ghetto Lvov, I witnessed one of the most gruesome Aktionen in the history of the ghettoes. With my own eyes I beheld what we call the Children Aktion. I saw the Nazi beasts tearing children from their parents, heaving them like inanimate objects onto carts and hauling them off to the Janowski camp.

Until this very day I am still visited in my dreams by these horrid scenes. I can still hear the heartrending cries of the mothers and the mute, agony-filled stares of these Jewish children. In my heart I vowed

that if the Master of the World ordained to leave me alive, I would devote my efforts and strength to the task of rescuing children and bringing them back to the fold of their people.

I had fulfilled this vow even before the war was over. With the liberation of Lvov in late 1944, I began to act in accordance with the pledge I had made to myself, and began with the children under the care of the Metropolitan Sheptytskyi. The Ukrainian Archbishop had issued directives to all the monasteries in Eastern Galicia under his jurisdiction to take in Jewish children and hide them. A nun in charge of the women's order of the Studites, known as Ihumeness (prioress) Yosefa, was particularly active in this area. And now the time had come to take the children out of monasteries and convents, and distribute them among the surviving Jewish families.

I attempted to redeem the daughter of Rabbi Halberstamm, who was also the granddaughter of the late rabbi of Trzebynia, Dov Berish Weidenfeld. Unfortunately, I was not successful.

Working without outside help and without any funds was very difficult those days. But I persevered with zeal, devotion and fidelity, moved by strong determination to fulfill my pledge.

In July 1945, two months after the end of the war, we founded two childrens homes on behalf of the Organizational Committee of Jewish Religious Associations in Poland: one in Zabrze, near Katowice in Upper Silesia, and one in Geszcze Puste in Lower Silesia. The institution in Geszcze Puste stayed open for eighteen months, whereas the children home in Zabrze was not closed until 1949 and served as the symbol of redeeming children in Poland.

To these homes we brought children whom we succeeded in rescuing from destruction and apostasy: from monasteries, Christian families, from the woods and bunkers, and from many other places. This sacred venture was headed by my faithful friend in the army rabbinate, Captain Yeshaya Drucker (who was later promoted to the rank of major). Drucker was a warm, kind, conscientous and friendly person, a good-natured Jew, possessed of spiritual qualities. He was not deterred by difficulties and persisted in his endeavors even when personal risk was involved.

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"Good deeds are done by good men" (Sanhedrin, 8:1). This is how the sages of Talmud describe an important moral task, performed by a person of great moral qualities and highly develped sense of responsibility. Such a person was Yeshaya Drucker who devoted himself to the task of redeeming the surviving Jewish children. His noble, sensitive soul guided him in his devotion and found the right way for him to attend to their needs. In their turn, these unfortunate children sensed they were being approached by a devoted and faithful friend. and repayed him with complete trust. No one offered him this difficult and responsible post. He volunteered for the hard and holy duty, and acquitted himself of the task on behalf of the Organizational Committee with great success, until the closure of the childrens home.

Childrens homes in Zabrze and Geszcza Pusta

The rescue of Jewish children at the close of World War II forms one of the most stormy and moving chapters in the chronicles of the Holocaust.

Some of the children lived in Catholic institutions, some had found shelter in homes of Polish families, others wandered in the woods like wild animals without any protection of adults. Those accommodated in monasteries were spared material deprivations; their needs were taken care of, and they knew no want. At the same time, however, their souls were imperiled. More than once their custodians had attempted to dislodge from the children's minds the memory of their origins and even implant in their hearts hatred for Jewry and Judaism. Most monasteries refused to hand back the children to any child care institutions unless a request was received from their parents. Needless to say, the parents were no longer among the living.

In this way many children were severed from the faith of their people. Many forgot completely they were Jews. Not a few imbibed Jew-hatred from their anti-Semitic custodians. On more than one occasion I heard from such children expressions like: "I don't want to go back to the Jews who killed God!" or, "Christ is my father and the Holy Mary my mother."

Many of them believed with all their hearts they were Polish Catholics, whereas others, chastened by bitter experience, denied they were Jews out of fear. Older children threatened to commit suicide unless we returned them to their Christian surroundings, or seized every opportunity to demonstrate their hatred for all things Jewish. In the first days of their stay in the childrens home in Zabrze one could hear in the sleeping quarters the sounds of prayers to "the Holy Mother," and "the Savior Jesus" to save them from "the hands of the accursed Jews."

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Most of the time the children were very depressed, they neither laughed nor cried. Many looked like old people, despairing and mute, without a grain of childish buoyancy. Everything aroused their fear and mistrust. They harbored suspicions toward everything and everyone. Watching them one was seized by terror; imprisoned in their inner world they would walk about all day like shadows, solitary, immersed in their past.

Many did not know their family name, others carried names given to them by their rescuers. Our childrens home at Zabrze had to cope with an arduous task of creating a homely, warm environment for these children, which would enable them to feel the taste of life again, to restore to them some of the childhood they had been so cruelly deprived of.

Most of the redeemed children were girls. Monasteries and many individual Christians preferred not to take chances and refused to shelter boys. The Nazis would strip any caught boy to see whether he was circumcised. Woe to the child whose father had circumcised him!

These children were brought back to the Jewish fold in various ways, including ingenious ploys. Some of them we bought with money, plain and simple, some we took by force, whereas others were returned to us after prolonged legal battles.

Negotiations and bargaining with the Christians often became a nasty business. We would come to save the child's soul, but the seller demanded a reward both for the body and the soul. All the rules of bargaining applied; it was like haggling a "merchandise" like any

other. Ocassionally very large amounts of money changed hands; more often than not the Christian custodians demanded exorbitant amounts of money for the children.

In several cases the relatives gave houses and businesses in exchange for the child. There were also cases of rescuing children by force. When all other means to save the child proved ineffective, we went into action as soldiers. A car with a group of armed soldiers carrying forged orders for delivering the child would pull up at the house of its rescuer. While some of them talked to the person involved, others would grab the child and get away from the village.

Often, however, we had to appeal to the courts. In those cases we had to produce a real blood relative who sued for custody of the child, and when this proved impossible we would "make" such relative. There was a great difference between Soviet and Polish courts in this regard. In Soviet jurisprudence the child belonged to his foster parents who had brought him or her up, and not to his biological parents. Many went away from these horrible trials with broken hearts. In contrast, Polish courts recognized the rights of biological parents or a blood relative, and more often than not ruled in favor of returning the child to its Jewish home.

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All this notwithstanding, it must be said that in the early days after the liberation there some Christians came to Jewish communities on their own initiative, and delivered the Jewish children to them without asking for reward. These Christians who did not try to turn the fulfillment of the commandment to save a child to their advantage were

the true righteous among the nations.

The staff of the childrens home in Zabrze worked miracles in bringing the children together and providing them with Jewish education. The director of the the childrens home, Dr. Geler, did everything possible to infuse the place with homeliness and warmth so that the children could at least feel some taste of home again. The religious educator, Margalith, went to great lengths to instill the spirit of Judaism in the minds of his charges. He proved to be an excellent teacher and acquitted himself admirably of his sacred task. Unfortunately, his efforts not always bore fruit. The seed of Polish-Christian education sometimes proved too deeply implanted to be quickly replaced by Jewish mores and religion, and consequently gradual educational methods had to be used. The kind and genial Major Drucker was in charge of the childrens home and his paternal, moderate approach helped to infuse the childrens' surroundings with calm and the spirit of generosity.

The Organizational Committee bore the burden of financing the activities of the childrens home. Funds for ransoming Jewish children came from the Orthodox Rescue Committee in America, from the JOINT, and from the fund established by Chief Rabbi Hertz in London. The foundation of British Jews was headed by Rabbi Shlomo Schoenfeld, a faithful friend of the Organizational Committee, who was wholeheartedly devoted to the Zabrze childrens home. In the years 1945-46 Rabbi Schoenfeld visited Poland several times and transferred to London some 200 children. During his visit to Warsaw in August 1946, late Rabbi A. Herzog took back with him about 500 children.

We were not alone in the work of ransoming children in those days. Other involved bodies included Agudath Israel and, on a larger scale, the so-called Koordynacja, an umbrella organization of all Zionist movements directed by the Jewish Agency in Jerusalem. The Jewish Agency was financing the Koordynacja's vigorous activities in the area of ransoming children, and refused to cooperate with Mr. Drucker. Drucker met several times with the emissary from Israel and head of the Koordynacja, Mr. Kapelinski, to discuss the matter. For my own part I met with late Itzhak Grunebaum to discuss the same topic. We offered cooperation, but except for vague promises we received nothing from them. The way I see it, the leaders of Koordynacja, in general, and Itzhak Grunebaum, who stayed in Poland at that time, in particular, refused to tolerate a religious childrens home as part of their framework.

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Of particular interest was the position taken by the Central Committee of Jews in Poland toward the question of ransoming children. Generally speaking, they opposed it. In their view a Polish family who had sheltered a Jewish child and currently was serving as its custodian must be given support. However, in secret they agreed that the child should remain in a Polish environment, even though they were fully aware that by and by the child would be severed from Jewishness.

All in all, the combined efforts of all bodies involved in ransoming children resulted in 2,500 children. This number was quite insignificant. Thousands of children remained in Poland and in the eastern areas occupied by the Soviet Union. However, I believe that we

must be grateful to those Polish families who sheltered Jewish children, regardless of the reasons for their doing so. After all they risked their own lives and the lives of their families. No riches in the world can repay a person for saving the soul of a Jewish child. This is exactly the view of the Commission for the Designation of the Righteous Among the Nations, which was charged by law with this task as part of Yad Vashem Heroes and Martyrs' Remembrance Authority. The Jewish people shall never forget the horrors of the Holocaust, but neither will it forget the Pole who risked his life to save a Jewish child.

In late 1949, with the liquidation of Zionist activity in Poland, the Zabrze childrens home was closed. In my estimate, 90% of the children redeemed by the Organizational Committee of Jewish Religious Congregations in Poland through the unforgettable Major Drucker, now live in Israel. Details about Drucker's amazing work can be found in the Oral Documentation Section of the Institute of Contemporary Jewry, Hebrew University of Jerusalem (28-[68], A, B, C, D)

The visit of the Anglo-American Commission for Palestine in Warsaw

In February 1946 the Anglo-American Commission for Palestine arrived in Warsaw. The Commission worked on behalf of the United Nations in New York where discussions were conducted at that time on the question of the Land of Israel and the situation of Jews after the Holocaust. This particular commission decided to visit Poland in order to get a first-hand account of the destruction of Polish Jewry, to meet with the surviving remnant, and to hear from them their plans for the

future: did they want to build a new life in Poland, or were they seeking to emigrate, and if so, where?

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Needless to say, the Commission's visit was of great importance to the Jewish people in general and the Zionist movement in particular. Our replies to the Commission's queries and our views on our future in Poland were of great importance for the decision of the United Nations about the establishment of the independent Jewish State. It was clear that members of the Commission would hear first the views of the Central Committee of Polish Jews who regarded themselves as sole representatives of Polish Jewry. An argument developed between the Zionist and left-wing members of the Central Committee concerning the demands to be put forward before the Commission and their formulation. After a prolonged consultation all the Zionist movements decided to submit three demands: 1) Repeal of the White Paper; 2) opening the Land of Israel for Jewish immigration; 3) establishment of an independent Jewish State in the Land of Israel.

Non-Zionist members of the Central Committee who wielded decisive influence agreed to the first two demands but refused absolutely to press for the establishment of an independent Jewish state in the Land of Israel. After a bitter and prolonged discussion the Zionist movements backed down and endorsed a vague compromise "demanding an independent Jewish existence in the Land of Israel." It was most unfortunate that the Zionist leaders were ignorant of the popular mood: the overwhelming majority of Polish Jewry expressly demanded a Jewish State in the Land of Israel. Had they been more insistent, the left-

wingers in the Central Committee would have to yield.

The Committee of Religious Congregations comprising Mizrahi, Agudat Israel and General Zionists did not intervene. As a non-Zionist movement, Agudat Israel adhered to a position of neutrality on the question of the Jewish State; Mizrahi and General Zionists did take part in the debate and agreed with other Zionist movements to a compromise formula.

The Commission, however, insisted on hearing testimony by a representative of the religious community not represented in the Central Committee of Polish Jews. In early February, a few days after the Commission's arrival in Poland, I received a special invitation issued by the American Embassy asking me to appear before the Commission in my capacity as chairman of the Committee of Religious Congregations and express my views on the problem of the Land of Israel and the situation of Jews in Poland.

The American ambassador ensured that the Chief of Staff, General Rola-Zymierski, under whom I served, grant me a permit to appear before the Commission. The General did not have any reservations; on the contrary, he emphasized that my appearance was a sacred duty and wished me luck.

I was asked three questions:

1) What was the factual situation of Polish Jewry after the war?
2) What were my views on the question of the Land of Israel?
3) Was it true that should the independent Jewish State come into being, the Jews plan to establish a theocratic regime there?

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I did not bring with me a ready memorandum such as prepared by the Central Committee; the latter was a well thought-out affair, abounding with political phraseology. I answered the first question according to the dictates of my heart as a Jew. In simple words I related the ordeal of the Jew under Nazi occupation; I described the sanguinary and untramelled hatred of the Jews harbored by most Poles after the war; I showed them pamphlets of the reactionary factions of the Polish underground, and, finally, I recounted the panic of emigration which had seized the surviving remnant.

I told the Commission that there were two main reasons for Jewish flight from Poland. The first was that people could not live in a graveyard. The entire country was strewn with Jewish graves; for Jews the land was but one big graveyard. The second reason was the lesson we had learned during the Holocaust: in no place were Jewish lives secure. I myself could not be certain that the Holocaust would not be repeated. If not tomorrow, or the day after tomorrow, then it could occur in fifty or a hundred years. And if not in Europe then someplace else. In view of this it was necessary for the Jews to have their own independent country in which they would feel secure. Furthermore, I said, ever since the destruction of the Temple we had not despaired of hope and faith in our return to the Land of Israel. From time immemorial the Land of Israel formed the center of our lives, the object of our dreams, prayers and thoughts. At this point I addressed myself to the second question: my views on the question of the Land of Israel. I said that Polish Jews were leaving the country in the hope of

reaching the Land of Israel in one way or another. True, some of them dream about emigrating to America, Australia, or some other country, but the majority wish to go to the Land of Israel. Difficulties do exist. Britain had closed the gates of the land to Jewish immigration. The White Paper and everything it implies is in force. But I, as a religious Jew, am certain that all the difficulties will be removed in due course. I am astonished, I said, by the behavior of the English people, called "the people of the Bible," who read the Book and know what is written in it. After all, the thread that runs through the whole Book of Books is the divine promise "I shall give this country to you and to your seed." God has promised us that the Land of Israel will be an independent Jewish state.

The English member of the Anglo-American Commission, an MP who represented the British government, led the questioning on the third issue, namely, the question of a theocratic regime in the Land of Israel.

In my reply I went to great lengths to ridicule the premise of the question itself. After all, I said, according to the Book of Chronicles, when the kingdom of Israel was founded, the prophet Samuel demanded that the state be founded on theocratic principles. Already then the people refused to do so, and no one has succeeded in this task throughout our long history. Naturally, observant Jews would demand that the state of the Jews would be founded on the principles of morality as expounded by the prophets, on the legal and judicial principles laid down by the Talmud sages, the principles which accord with the most advanced modern legislation. But this is a long way to a

theocratic state. Morever, religious Jews are in a minority in the World Zionist Organization.

The Englishman asked many irrelevant questions on Jewish emigration from Poland. He clearly was doing his best to defend his government and its policy as spelled out in the White Paper, and the blocking of Jewish immigration to the Land of Israel.

On behalf of the Committee of Religious Congregations I submitted the following demands to the Commission:

1. Repeal of the White Paper;
2. Opening the gates of the Land of Israel before the tormented Jewish people;
3. The establishment of an independent Jewish state in the area currently known as "Palestine."

This sums up my appearance before the Anglo-American Commission. Our conversation was free, lively, and unrestrained; I would even go as far as saying it was a conversation between friends. Unfortunately, many its details have slipped my memory.

Materials about the entire question are to be found in the Zionist Archives, Jerusalem, file "nun" - S25/6448.

The Kielce Pogrom

When I review my notes taken in 1946, just one year after the horrors of World War II, I am stunned and find myself refusing to believe it: Did all this really happen?

Only a year previously Nazi Germany had suffered a total defeat. We believed that the land had become peaceful, and that the surviving

remnant could return to their homes without fear, could begin to recuperate and go on living in peace after years of torment and wanderings.

Disaster struck without warning; suddenly we found ourselves in a renewed circle of looting, murder and destruction. Every day information flowed to the headquarters of the Committee of Religious Congregations at 6 Twarda Street. Terrible news of murder and assault against individual Jews and Jewish families who dared to return to their homes in towns and villages, and ask their Polish neighbors to restore their property, or just to take up residence again in the place where they had lived before the war.

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A sizable section of the Polish people, above all the extreme right, including the former Endeks and other reactionary groupings, as well as masses of simple Catholic folk, all of them loathing the new regime, decided to pour out their wrath against the surviving remnant and to complete the work of Hitler, may his name be blotted out. They justified their villanous, despicable undertaking by pointing to the preponderance of Jews among senior officials of the new regime. In their pamphlets they accused the handful of Jewish survivors of foisting communism on Poland and of supporting it.

From May 1945 until the end of 1946, a network of underground organizations functioned in Poland; their objective was to liquidate party members, army officers and officials working for the new regime. Their secret orders said explicitly that every Jew who happened to come their way was to be shot. Most murders of Jews were carried out by two

murderous organizations with fascist orientation: N.S.Z. - Narodowe Sily Zbrojne (National Armed Forces) and W.I.N. - Wolnosc i Niepodleglosc (Freedom and Independence).

No road in Poland was safe for Jews. The murderers would remove Jews from trains, automobiles, buses, even from their homes, drag them to a nearby forest and kill them. In March 1946, five young members of Hapoel Hamizrahi travelled by car from Lodz to Krakow. They were intercepted in the woods near Piotrkow, taken out of the car and shot. The names of the victims were: Tzipora Strovinski, Abraham Farsel, Shmuel Richbard and Yehiel Friedman; the name of the fifth has slipped my memory. According to my notes, based on information from a reliable source in the Ministry of Security in Warsaw, in 1945 alone 351 Jews were murdered by fascist murderers in Poland; in 1946 over 400 lost their lives in this fashion. In the first half of 1946 the murderers began resorting to the age-old and tried device: the blood libel.

On the eve of Passover of 1946, leaflets with the following warning appeared throughout Poland, in every city, town and village: "Strzez swe dziecko, coraz wiecej gina dzieci" (Watch your children, more and more children are disappearing). This mean-spirited warning implied that the disappearing children were abducted by Jews so that their blood could be used for baking matzoth. Alarming news and rumors began coming in from all parts of the country. Their message was one and the same: a Polish child has disappeared, the Jews snatched him to use his blood for the matzoth. The wall announcements told a detailed story about a rabbi who had been caught in the synagogue, his apron bloodstained, the body of a dead child with stab wounds hanging nearby.

The name of the child was listed too: Bronislawa Mendan.

In view of the rapidly deteriorating situation the Committee of Religious Congregations gathered for a special meeting and decided to dispatch a delegation to the head of the Catholic Church in Poland, Primate Cardinal Hlond, to inform him of our anguish over the murders of the surviving remnant by Polish citizens, and about the circulation of the dangerous and malicious blood libel. The delegation was to ask Cardinal Hlond to publish a pastoral letter to his flock condemning the brutal murders and denouncing the blood libel in the strongest terms.

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In the middle of May 1946, the general secretary of the Committee of Religious Congregations, Michael Zilberberg, set out for Poznan, the headquarters of Cardinal Hlond, to prepare the meeting between our delegation and the Cardinal. Zilberberg was received very cordially by the Cardinal, but the latter evaded setting an appointment with the delegation, hiding behind the excuse of old age and sickness. His words were smooth and conciliatory; he even expressed sympathy for the Jewish people and the Jewish state, but did not issue a pastoral letter. For his part, Zilberberg erred when he entered into a conversation with the Cardinal instead of fulfilling his mission which was to prepare a meeting between the delegation of the Committee of Religious Congregations and head of the Polish Catholic Church.

The following is the full text of the conversation between Hlond and Zilberberg. It has never before been published.

His Holiness Cardinal Hlond on the Jewish tragedy

Several days ago His Holiness Cardinal Hlond held a long conversation in his residence in Poznan with a representative of Jewish Religious Congregations, Professor Michael Zilberberg. The atmosphere was most cordial throughout. The Cardinal evinced genuine interest in the fate of the surviving Jews and the conversation itself went beyond the customary official framework of such meetings. The head of the Polish Catholic Church was visibly moved to the bottom of his heart by the recent tragedy of the Jewish people.

"It seems to me," the Cardinal began, "that the Old Testament contains immortal truths. The ten commandments and the inspired words of the prophets should have disturbed the peace of this devil personified, that Hitler was. With the arrogance of the Antichrist he imagined that if he succeeded in murdering all the Jews, the eternal foundations of the existing civilization would vanish and the world would find itself under the sway, not only physical but spiritual as well, of the pagan thought of National-Socialism. He could not have possibly succeeded in accomplishing this and despite enormous losses suffered by the Jewish people, it did not emerge from the war crushed and dejected."

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Zilberberg: "On behalf of Religious Congregations I would like to thank through you, Your Holiness, to all those who helped us to escape the ovens. I have in mind, above all, convents whose nuns undertook great efforts to save children."

Hlond: "I am very glad to hear this. Every person for whom the foundations of our Church are not just empty sounds should have behaved

that way. For my own part, during my stay in France I endeavored to secure Aryan papers for Polish Jews, particularly the "yellow" documents which enabled their holders to emigrate to America."

Zilberberg: "How would you, Your Holiness, explain the fact that Hitler chose Poland as the site of murder of Jews from all European countries?

Hlond: "I thought about it more than once. Perhaps the best answer I found in Rauschening's book. He was the one to tell me this. The author recounts several conversations with Hitler which took place before his rise to power. In one of these conversations Hitler set out to demonstrate that only the introduction of slavery guarantees the power of the state. Hitler quoted examples of ancient states and even the fluorishing of a number of empires in our times. In this conversation Rauschening learned also that Hitler was planning to turn Poland into a slave country. About ten million people were to be left alive there to work for the greatness of Germany. The others were doomed to die. The extermination of the Jews was to mark the beginning of the realization of Hitler's plans.

Zilberberg: "Is Your Holiness aware of incidents of attacks on Jews after the liberation of Poland?

Hlond: These incidents make me truly sad. Even if we disregard the arguments grounded in the fundamental principles of Christanity, there are no objective conditions in Poland for the spread of anti-Semitism. This is a real madness on the part of people carrying on in underground and hiding in the woods. They seem to believe that they are pursuing a policy and fight the government by attacking Jews. As a Catholic and a Pole I condemn their actions.

Zilberberg: "What are the views of Your Holiness on the question of the Land of Israel?

Hlond: "Restoration of the independence of the Jewish state is of immense importance. After years of disasters and tragedies the Jewish people will rise again in its full spendor. I do not know how many people Palestine can absorb. It seems that at the present moment it is capable of absorbing no more than one million Jews. This will be wonderful. From the bottom of my heart I wish you success in all your endeavors. We will surely reach an understanding regarding the holy places.

"I am glad you have visited me. Please convey words of encouragment to your brethren and sisters. I am close to them both in their great tragedy and in their days of joy. Remember that in tragic moments only faith has the power to avert disaster.

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The effects of the atrocity propaganda were not late in coming. Although Cardinal Hlond's assurances did have a calming effect on Jews in Poland and succeeded in allaying their fears, he appeared to have no influence whatsoever on the Catholic population of Kielce.

On Thursday morning, July 4, 1946, an eight-year-old boy, Henryk Blaszczak, passed through the streets of Kielce with his father. The latter related to every passer-by he came across the story of Jews who had abducted his child and tortured him for two days in the basement of 7 Planty Street, intending to kill him and draw his blood. The boy recounted the story of his miraculous rescue and escape from the murderers' clutches.

The news took wing and within a few hours had spread throughout the town. By 10 a.m. several hundred people had gathered in front of the house at 7 Planty Street; by noon the crowd had swelled to two thousand.

At that time some 250 Jews lived in Kielce, including survivors of the Holocaust and expatriates from the Soviet Union. Most of them resided at 7 Planty Street, where the community house and headquarters of Kibbutz Ihud were located.

Instigators moved through the crowd, inciting the people to storm the building and kill the Jews. Cries broke forth: "Death to the Jews!" "Death to the murderers of our children!" "We'll finish Hitler's job!"

The Jews locked themselves up in the house, drew the shutters and made preparations to defend themselves with the few weapons at their disposal. Shortly after noon a group of armed policemen arrived under the command of sergeant Wladyslaw Blachut, who had been dispatched to disperse the crowd and restore order. Blachut called on the Jews to open the gate and let him and his men inside. The besieged Jews heaved a sigh of relief. Finally, they believed, salvation had come! Balchut with his men would rescue them from the wrathful mob. We can only imagine their astonishment and disappointment when Blachut ordered them to hand in their weapons and go down to the courtyard.

Later, the investigation revealed that Blachut was the only policeman to be dispatched; his "helpers" were killers recruited from the assembled mob. He disarmed the Jews, who now stood defenceless before the crowd. When they refused to go down to the courtyard he set upon them with the butt of his pistol, striking at their heads and

screaming, "The Germans didn't have enough time to finish you off, and we'll finish the job."

This was the signal for the crowd to storm the building, tearing down the doors, smashing shutters and windows. After breaking inside the mob stormed through the house, beating, killing, and breaking everything in sight. No hold were barred; they used fists, wooden planks, stones, and iron bars which had been prepared in advance by the instigators of the pogrom.

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At the same time other members of the frenzied mob scattered through the city streets, pulling Jews from their homes and killing them on the spot. Large crowds descended on the railway station, where they split up into smaller groups and began searching the trains passing through Kielce. Passengers who looked like Jews were dragged from the train and beaten to death on the spot.

Security forces were sent from Lodz to restore order,but these arrived in Kielce only toward evening. The same evening eighty people were arrested.

At six the next morning, Minister of Security Radkiewicz arrived in the town, accompanied by Attorney General Dab. After a number of consultations, the minister issued urgent orders to set up a special military court to try the first defendants accused of murders. The same day, Kielce Police Chief Zagorski, the regional commander of security forces, Major Stawczynski, and the commander, Colonel Kuzminski, were placed under arrest as bearing responsibility for the bloody events.

Saturday night I and several members of the Committee of Religious

Congregations flew to Kielce to be on the scene and to gather testimony from the survivors. Here are some of their stories.

On the day of the massacre Moshe Zalzman, a young poet, was on his way to Lodz by train to bring a manuscript to the Association of Yiddish Writers. The murderers spotted him in one of the cars and took him outside. One of them began hitting Zalzman on the head and all over his body with a chunk of coal. After a while he was replaced by another rioter, until Zalzman fainted and fell on the ground.

The murderers would not suffice with just killing; they sought to torture their victims mercilessly before they died. "Shoot me, I can't take this anymore," pleaded Yosef Feingold to the mob. "Oh, no, we won't shoot you. Suffer and bleed, you accursed Jew!" was their reply.

This was an orgy of torture, a sanguinary, almost mystical dance of murder, killing as a sacred duty.

A Jew from Cracow by the name of Kaner was hit repeatedly over the head with iron bars. Smartly dressed women spurred the murderers on with cries, "Give them some more!"

Dorfman, a barber from Otwock, first had his nose broken. They did this slowly, without haste. Then they broke his teeth and jaw.

Melekh Gleit of Chmielnik was hit with spars of wood. Two Jews from Woldawa, Abraham Kitajewicz and Abraham Goldstein, were beaten with paving stones ripped from the street. Other Jews had their bellies pierced with bayonettes, their hands and legs broken, heads bashed in, legs trampled.

Two Jews, Feinekuv and Harendorf, threw themselves heroically into the battle to rescue their wounded brethren. The murderers killed them

mercilessly.

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Among those dealing fierce blows to the defenceless victims were even young mothers, such as, Antonina Biskupska, 26, who left her four-year-old son at home, to indulge in this gruesome task. She cheered the murderers on, seeking to avenge the Christian boy "whom the Jews tortured to death."

The Funeral

The funeral took place on Monday, July 8, 1946. A huge crowd was in attendance, nearly all the residents of the town. As the funeral procession passed I kept looking in the faces of people crowding both sides of the street. What do they feel? What do they think? I wondered. I cannot say their faces showed repentance or sorrow; on the contrary, I saw only suppressed smiles and mocking stares, which accompanied me to the graveyard.

At noon that day the Kielce graveyard lay before us in all the squalor of its ruins. A huge mass grave gaped open among fragments of tombstone scattered about half-opened graves. Forty one coffins were lowered into its depths one by one.

The first to eulogize the victims was Dr. Adolf Berman, speaking on behalf of the Central Committee of Jews in Poland. After him spoke Minister Koczarowski on behalf of the Polish government, followed by Professor Gorecki on behalf of the League Against Racism. The two Polish representatives expressed great sorrow and indignation, and spoke of the disgrace with which the Catholic residents of Kielce had

covered their people and their country. Dr. Berman, speaking on behalf of the Central Committee, said, inter alia: "We have run out of words, we have run out of tears; after all we have gone through, and after all that has happened now, we can only say: "Cry out, Jewish people! Wave your fists against the forces of darkness which strive to strangle us!"

The funeral was over. Our cantor, Moshe Kosovitski, recited the prayer for the dead and El maleh rachamim (God Full of Compassion). The terrible tragedy of annihilated Polish Jewry rang out in these pure sounds. The mourners said Kaddish and this author was the last to deliver a eulogy on behalf of the Committee of Religious Congregations and the Rabbinical Council of Poland. Among other things, I referred to Chapter 21 of the Book of Deuteronomy, concerning the "beheaded heifer." In this connection I laid the blame for this murder on the Catholic clergy and the Polish intelligentsia: "What have you done since the end of the terrible world war to teach the Polish people about the enormity of the destruction of Polish Jews on your land? What have you done to explicate the disastrous consequences of the vicious lie called the "blood libel"? The Polish Catholic clergy and large parts of Polish intelligentsia are not be able to say: "Our hands did not shed this innocent blood."

Here are the names of the victims of the Kielce pogrom:

1. Barukh Israel
2. Duchka Flora (a girl)
3. Eisenberg
4. Elbirt
5. Feinkuchen
18. Mikulewski Mendel
19. Morawiec Moshe
20. Plotna Shalom
21. Praszowska Esther
22. Preiss Itzhak

6. Fish Adam (a boy)
7. Fish Regina
8. Friedman Berl
9. Gertner Bilha
10. Gottstuts Bilha
11. Gutwerzel Fela
12. Harendorf Leizer
13. Dr. Kahane Severyn
14. Kasut
15. Keresh Shmuel
16. Kesh Herzl
17. Korf Shmuel
23. Rajzman
24. Rubindorf
25. Samborski
26. Shulmanowicz Z.
27. Schumacher Fania
28. Sokolowski Yehiel
29. Tennenboim Nathan
30. Weinberg
31. Weinreb
32. Weintraub Abraham
33. Wuzdler

Thirty-three bodies of men, women and children were identified by witnesses and relatives; some by papers found on them, others by clothing. Eight coffins contained bodies smashed beyond recognition; they were buried anonymously. Among them was a body on whose arm was tattooed Number 2969A of the Auschwitz camp. Six of the injured died of their wounds in a hospital in Kielce one week after the funeral. The total number of victims reached forty-seven.

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The Trial

On July 11, 1945, the first group of rioters was put on trial before a special military court. Various tools and "implements" they had used were displayed before the judges as exhibits on a separate table: iron bars and pipes, axes, stones, poles, two pistols, and ... three bloodstained suits of clothing.

I attended the proceedings and kept looking at the defendants' faces. All of them sat with their heads lowered; they did not dare to look into the eyes of the judges and at the audience.

Here are some of the defendants who etched themselves on my memory:

Antonina Biskupska, 26, mother of a four-year-old boy. On that bloody Thursday she left her home, and standing in front of the crowd shouted: "Death to the Jews, the murderers of our children!" Together with others she threw stones at the house at 7 Planty Street. Speaking with a quivering voice she admitted that the charges were true. But, she said, she was a feeble woman prone to nervous breakdowns. Having heard about the murder of a Polish-Christian boy she lost control of herself. Something forced her to go out and join the crowd.

Jedwara Jurkowski, 40, an educated man, a player in the symphonic orchestra of Kielce. Heamarched at the head of the crowd, as if directing an orchestra, and shouted: "Men, forward! Death to the murderers of our children!" Jurkowski went to great lengths to prove that he had been drunk that day, but the judges demonstrated that the opposite was true.

Julian Pokrzewinski, 43. His bloodstained shirt lay on the table as an exhibit. He trampled on the belly of a wounded woman who rolled in her own blood on the pavement. Pokrzewinski did not even try to defend himself.

Durarz, a young man, aged 18, with blond hair, splintered the skull of a Jew on Planty Street. He confessed, expressed repentance and asked for the mercy of the court.

A group of four defendants, all of them lower middle class persons,

was in the dock: Stefan Mazur, a guard; Kazimierz Nowakowski, a bakery owner; Jozef Sliwa, a cobbler; Antoni Pruszkowski, a shopkeeper. On that bloody Thursday the four pulled Regina Fisz and her child from her home, brought them to the woods, robbed her of 157 dollars and three gold coins--her entire savings--and then murdered her and her son with iron bars.

The special military court passed eleven death sentences that day. Many defendants were sentenced to life in prison or given long sentences.

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Responses in the Polish press

and in the circles of the Catholic Clergy

All Polish newspapers--to recall, at that time Poland still boasted a free press--published editorials forcefully and sincerely denouncing the pogrom. All of them laid the blame at the doorstep of Polish reactionary circles, particularly the Catholic clergy, who despite their ability to do so did not forestall the pogrom. All political parties and all newspapers asked the same question in an apologetic vein: How could something like that happen after the liberation of Poland? One exception to this trend was the representative of P.S.L. - Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe (Polish People's Party), Stanislaw Mikolajczyk. On July 9, Mikolajczyk's organ, Gazeta Ludowa, published a statement on his behalf. While expressing shock at the Kielce pogrom, Mikolajczyk ventured an opinion that the affair had not yet been properly investigated and said he was troubled by possible reasons for the delay. According to him, only a thorough investigation of all the

circumstances surrounding the pogrom can warrant conclusions. The information which had accumulated until now, Mikolajczyk argued, did not cast sufficient light on the causes of the events and their course. This was the opinion of Gazeta Ludowa. Several dozen Jews were murdered with beastly savagery by a mob in Kielce, but for this particular newspaper this was not enough to conclude that it amounted to a bloody, abominable pogrom, plain and simple. The Gazeta Ludowa's writers appeared to have been unable to utter a word of protest, of indignation, of condolence. The between-the-lines message was "and perhaps the Jews themselves are to blame?"

The announcement of the head of the Catholic Church in Poland, Cardinal Hlond, was shameless and full of prejudice against Polish Jewry. His statement, issued under pressure of foreign press, said, inter alia, that the Catholic Church opposed and denounced all murder, regardless of the causes. As for the murder of the Jews of Kielce, the Cardinal was of the view that the causes could not be sought in racism and hatred of Jews on the part of the Polish people. The Cardinal concluded his vague statement by expressing his opposition to the participation of the Jewish people in the life of Polish society. Too many Jews held key governmental posts. In saying this the Cardinal showed his true colors; it was as if he justified the actions of the Kielce mob. The following is the text of the Cardinal's statement:

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Remarks made by Cardinal August Hlond, Primate of Poland,

to American journalists in Warsaw, July 11, 1946

1. The Catholic Church has always condemned murder everywhere. It condemns it also when it takes place in Poland, regardless of whether the victims are Jews or Poles, in Kielce and in other localities in the Republic.
2. The course of the unfortunate and regrettable events in Kielce indicates that they cannot be attributed to racism. These events occurred against a completely different, painful and tragic background; they constitute a monstrous tragedy which fills my heart with grief and sorrow.
3. The Catholic clergy in Kielce fulfilled its duty. When news of the events reached the local clergy, priest Roman Zelk, who officiates in the cathedral, rushed to the scene but was turned back by the military at Planty Street. With the removal of the military guard five priests set off to the scene of the events. They saw that the large crowd had already dispersed and advised small groups of people still present to return home. The next day (July 5) an episcopalian representative, in consultation with the authorities and municipal officials, drew up an appeal aimed at restoring calm. The appeal was endorsed by the Voivoda (province governor). The authorities, however, refrained from making this appeal public.

   On July 6, the bishopric published its own appeal which was read the next day (July 7, Sunday) from the pulpits of all Catholic churches in the city. A copy of this appeal is enclosed herewith. The fact that despite terrible agitation in Kielce, peace and order have prevailed there in the last week, must be attributed above all to the purposive and proper action on the part of the clergy.

4. In the course of the murderous German occupation, the Poles, who were themselves being exterminated, supported the Jews, sheltered and rescued them at the risk of their own lives. Many Jews in Poland owe their lives to Poles and Polish priests. The Jews who are now occupying key positions in the life of the country, striving to impose on it forms of a system which the overwhelming majority of the people reject, are largely responsible for the worsening of this attitude. This is a perilous game since it creates dangerous tensions. Unfortunately, a number of Jews fall in the armed violent clashes occuring on the political front, but so do many more Poles.
5. My own attitude to the Jews is well-known; it was given expression in statements issued even before the war. In the years of my exile in France I saved more than one Jew, Poles, Germans and Frenchmen from deportations to the death camps. Thanks to my efforts they were able to go to America, I secured shelters for them and endeavored to secure for them documents which enabled them to save their lives. With my whole heart I desire that in the postwar world the Jewish problem would at long last come to a solution.

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After that the Cardinal requested that his remarks be printed in the press in full and without revisions, but the journalists did not accede to this request. The rumor according to which the Cardinal asked that his remarks not be published in the Polish press is unfounded.

A comparison I made between the transcript of the conversation between Cardinal Hlond and the general secretary of the Committee of Religious Congregations, Michael Zilberberg, and the text of his

"statement" following the pogrom in Kielce yielded an enigma. It is absolutely clear that Hlond saw the leaflets which were then circulating throughout Poland in the thousands. Zilberberg even showed him the leaflet saying "Watch your children, more and more children disappear," which I mentioned earlier. Hlond evaded the issue. The possibility that he himself believed that Jews used Christian blood for baking matzoth cannot be completely discounted. Whatever the case, the fact remains that at least on the surface in his conversation with the secretary of our organization the Cardinal was very polite and sympathetic to the tragedy of Jews in Poland. To recall, in his reply to the question whether he knew of numerous cases of attacks on Jews by Poles after the liberation of the country, he said these incidents made him truly sad, that no objective conditions for anti-Semitism existed in Poland any more, that they were acts of real madness on the part of those who kept on the underground activity in the woods, that they (the attackers) seem to believe that by attacking Jews they were fighting the government and that he, Hlond, condemned their acts as a Pole and a Catholic.

In contrast, in his statement of July 11, 1946, he explicitly blamed the Jews with responsibility for the events in Kielce. How could these two statements be reconciled? Which one was true? Which one articulated his real views and showed the true colors of the Cardinal?

The official organ of the Vatican too saw it necessary to express its view on the Kielce affair. Responding to the accusations levelled by the Polish Prime Minister, Osobka-Morawski, against the Polish clergy for its failure to stand up as one man to protest against the

massacre in Kielce, the Osservatore Romano said that the Catholic Church did condemn acts such as murder "but, if we approach the matter rationally, the Catholic Church in Poland was requested to denounce something which has no bearing on its [the Church's] functions at all, something which under the disguise of fairness to the victims of the murder was liable to wrong other victims." To put it in less convoluted language, the Vatican said that although Jews were murdered in the streets of Kielce, the Polish clergy was neither obliged nor needed to intervene.

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Thus the Vatican's newspaper was overcome with feelings towards the Kielce murderers just as it pitied the Nazis during the Holocaust. When Jewish blood flowed down European streets like water, the pope kept silent.

In those gloomy days only one priest in all of Poland, the Bishop of Czestochowa, Kubina, vigorously raised his humane voice against the anti-Jewish provocation in Kielce and the pogrom which took place in the city. All the other Polish bishops, including one of the most famous, the Bishop of Cracow, Sapieha, a scion of one of the most aristocratic Polish families, known as "prince of the church," not even he found it necessary to issue a pastoral letter to his flock during the Holocaust on the mass murder of Jews in Poland. For one thousand years we lived and worked side by side with them on Polish soil. We were there already at the dawn of the Polish kingdom, the Piast dynasty, working and enriching the country's economy.

The only one in the old Poland to show the greatness and nobility

of his soul during the times of death and destruction was the Metropolitan of the Greek Orthodox Church in Lvov, Andrey Sheptytskyi. He immortalized his name by issuing a pastoral letter entitled "Thou shalt not murder" and wrote glorious pages in the annals of those days.

Upon my return to Warsaw I set down to write an open letter to the Catholic episcopate and Polish intelligentsia concerning the events in Kielce. I passed this letter on to Jakub Berman, asking him to publish it in all the newspapers in the country.

Berman, known as the "wire-puller" in the Polish Government, maintained direct contacts with Moscow and exerted influence in all offices and institutions of the country. Although he had been long since estranged from Jews and Judaism, nonetheless he realized the importance of this letter.

The following is the full text of my open letter to the Catholic bishops and the Polish intelligentsia:

An Open Letter to the Polish Episcopate and Polish Intelligentsia

"Have we not all one father?
Has not one God created us?
Why do we deal trecherously every man against his brother,
by profaning the convenant of our fathers?"

(Malachi 2:10)

Having emerged from the darkness of woe, having shaken off the chains of slavery, after the bloody war whose brunt was borne by all its citizens, the Polish republic rose up again. The land, drenched in the blood of millions of innocent victims, stirred and awakened to

life, life in the spirit of the sublime principles of justice and loving one's neighbor. We all offer our prayers to God on High, asking him to stretch His protection over our country every day of the year.

Ever since the earliest days of Poland we, the children of the ancient Jewish people, had participated in every sphere of life of the country for the sake of the economic well-being and greatness of the republic.

When the enemy rose up against the integrity of the borders of our country, Polish Jews joined the ranks of fighters to defend with our bodies the land that gave us birth, sustained and nourished us.

Unfortunately, under occupation, when truth was strangled and the demon of hatred celebrated with impunity, its venom seeped deeply into the hearts of many citizens. We Polish Jews bore the main brunt of barbarian Nazism and its propaganda of lies. The enemy selected Poland as the site of its notorious death industry in which, beside other nations, millions of Jews perished.

But, as it happened, the hatred so assiduously nurtured in the years of enslavement managed to send down deep roots among the people. Hardly a day passess without a murder of the Jewish remnants. The hoary slander originating in the Dark Ages, portraying Jews as practicing ritual murder, has been salvaged from the junkyard of lies, dusted off and circulated anew with deadly consequences.

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The guns fell silent, the rivers of blood of innocent victims stopped flowing and drenching the soil of every European country, and all the nations set about rebuilding life of peace. The Polish Jews,

however, have again sacrificed hundreds of victims on the altar of the bloodthirsty Moloch whose name is zoological anti-Semitism. All of this in the name of hatred without foundation, in the free, independent and democratic Poland of all places.

In less than a year we have witnessed for the third time well-organized pogroms (in Rzeszow, Krakow, Kielce). In each and every one of them this obscene fabrication of the blood libel has run like a red thread.

Individuals who went through fires of hell during the occupation are now being killed in their own homes, victims of unrestrained savagery.

In the heart of reborn Poland we have witnessed and experienced with our own flesh the atrocities known to us from the recent past of the nightmarish rule of Hitler. Kielce is but a most recent stage of this outrageous rampage with Rzeszow, Krakow, Radom and other cities and towns forming other links in the infamous chain.

How did it happen that the Catholic clergy and Polish intelligentsia, who are not completely ignorant of the fundamentals of our faith and with whom we have been living side by side in this country for one thousand years, have failed to explain to the confused people that all these accusations are so much rubbish, without a shred of foundation?

Christian shepherds and members of the Polish intelligentsia, the blood of innocent victims cries out to you: what have you done since the liberation of Poland to open the eyes of the masses of people?

Polish priests, in the name of the heavy sin of the innocent blood

which cries out for the revenge of heaven, in the name of the sublime principles set down in the Bible, in the persuasive words of Saul of Tarsus: "If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal" (I Cor. 13:1), we call upon you, high and honorable priests: address millions of your faithful from your palaces and church pulpits, send out pastoral letters to draw their attention to the injustice and sin of murdering innocent people.

I call upon the Polish intelligentsia, the torchbearers of science, the proud legators of great Polish democrats, visionaries and thinkers: has not the time come to rise your voice to instruct, to explain, to plant the seeds of understanding with the help of science and all other means at your disposal?

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Polish people, Slavic people, you, who is well-known for its hospitality, who opened your gates before the exiles and persecuted from all countries, regain your strength and come back to yourself. Remember, these acts reverberate strongly abroad and they blemish the good name of Poland and Poles.

Polish priests, Polish intelligentsia, Polish people: in the face of this new tragedy I call upon you to utter weighty words which would penetrate those whose hearts have turned to stone so that they may join the common and coordinated effort of all the citizens of our country for the good of all and the happiness of every individual."

Chief Rabbi of the Polish Army

Dr. David Kahane

Chairman of the Rabbinical Council of Polish Jews

Warsaw, July 5, 1946.

This text was, in fact, published in all the newspapers in Poland, and the response was not long in coming. On July 10, 1946 I received a letter addressed to the chairman of the Central Committee of Polish Jews in response to his funeral speech in Kielce and to me in response to my open letter to the Polish episcopate and the Polish people. The following is the text of the letter:

To citizen Berman, Deputy,

Representative of the Central Committee of Jews in Poland, Warsaw

To citizen David Kahane

Chief Rabbi, Warsaw

Gentlemen, I would like to speak to you in earnest, in a businesslike fashion, and calmly on the subject of Polish Jews.

I am a Pole, but not an anti-Semite, a democrat with progressive views but not a communist.

I am writing these words in response to the speech of citizen [Diet] Deputy [Berman] at the funeral of the Jewish victims in Kielce, and to the appeal issued by citizen rabbi [Kahane] addressed to the Polish people.

You, gentlemen, and other Jews holding positions of influence in Poland are advised to study the contents of my letter, if for no other reason than the consideration of the interest of the Jews.

You, the Jews, are good merchants, but bad politicians and psychologists.

As the Nazis were destroying you, the Poles sheltered and helped you very often in the face of your tragedy. And how do you show your

gratitude?

What are the facts as far as the Jewish question is concerned?

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Without wasting a moment's time the Jews climbed to the top, seized the most important state posts and now they are taking the lead in the life of the country.

The press, the radio, the film industry, industrial enterprises, the state ministries and other institutions have been taken over; everywhere there are large numbers of Jews, mainly in leading and influential positions.

It is my impression that the Polish people (including the working class) have never harbored a greater hatred toward the Jews than they do now; the Jews have only themselves to blame because you are too conspicuous as the main disseminators of Russian communism in Poland.

What good comes out of it?

What nation in the world can afford to look the other way under similar circumstances? Do you really think that the Poles will stay calm and bear with your hegemony in Poland?

You are indulging in illusions by reading articles and announcements in the press, all of which is one monolith, articles which are written mostly by Jews themselves who engage in wishful thinking.

Do not delude yourselves that despite the Polish names you have adopted you would be able to maintain your position in Poland in such unnaturally great numbers, unless the country becomes the 17th Soviet republic!

If something like that happens, it will be mainly because of you!

We are very familiar with the facts and know that in the years 1917-1918 Jews were the prime movers of the communist revolution in Russia. Poles do not want this happiness and this "paradise," and this is the source of the great antagonism between us and you.

If you stage a truly secret ballot among Polish workers, asking them whether they want bolshevism in Poland, you would find out that the overwhelming majority of them reject it.

After all even the PPR [Polish acronym for the ruling Polish Workers Party] does not call itself a communist party, for it is fully aware that this would make it even more unpopular among the workers.

I am neither a member of any political party, nor a "reactionary," but I look with unclouded eye at your work in Poland.

You have placed your stake on communism, despite all the fancy talk about democracy, patriotism and so forth.

Consider it carefully whether you yourselves do not share indirectly the responsibility for the Jewish blood which was shed in Kielce.

You do not know how to live together with the Polish people, you do not know how to keep withing bounds, and you are unable to fathom the mentality of the Poles.

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You are imitating Hitler in your desire to become Herrenvolk in Poland with Poles to serve you as a "nation of slaves."

Remember that Hitler lost, even though he was convinced of his success.

Remember that inexhaustible reserves of patriotism exist in the Polish people, in all sections of society. An example of this power is provided by our battles with the occupiers, especially in the last Warsaw uprising.

A Pole.

Copies of this letter were received by a number of Polish and Jewish personages.

All anti-Semites speak one language. In the same words they are out to prove that the Jews are themselves to blamé for the events in Kielce. Too many Jews hold key posts in the Polish Government. The Jews seek to foist a communist regime on the Polish people and the people defends itself. And in what way does it defend itself against Jewish communism? Naturally, by staging a pogrom in Kielce.

Jews are an ungrateful nation. The Poles rescued and sheltered them during the German occupation, whereas they show their gratitude by imposing an alien communist regime.

I was to hear the same argument several years later from Khrushchev: "Too many Jews, there are too many little Rubins in Poland." Still later, in 1967, the argument was repeated by Polish leaders, but this time it was accompanied by a nearly wholesale expulsion of Jews from the country; all the Jews who worked to build a new Poland after the war were forced to emigrate.

Let us return to the Kielce pogrom.

Among the attackers of the defenceless victims in Kielce were young mothers, musicians, people who read the writings of Polish writers and humanists - Mickiewicz, Slowacki, Eliza Orzeszkowa, Stefan Zeromski,

Stanislaw Reymont. The rioters desecrated the memory of these great personages. The orgy of spilling Jewish blood intoxicated them, even dispelling fear of punishment.

Where does this untrammelled hatred stem from?

Were the Kielce Jews economic competitors of their Polish neighbors? No, they lived in a kibbutz. They did not trade or engage in business. They were preparing themselves to immigrate to the Land of Israel.

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Did these 200 Jews form a political force, a political threat to Poland? Were they the ones who held key positions in our Polish Government?

The accusation that "Jews hold strategic positions" was an exaggeration and Polish Jews were well aware of it. We knew exactly how many and what kind of Jews served in senior governmental posts. According to our reliable information 8%, at the most 10% of senior posts in the administration and the economy were held by Jews, many of them non-communists; on the contrary they were good Zionists waiting for the first opportunity to go to the Land of Israel.

Where, then, did this hatred come from?

The Kielce pogrom was the largest and the bloodiest after Krakow, Radom and Rzeszow, and there fell the greatest number of victims since Hitler's defeat. Any analysis of the background of the pogrom in Kielce must take into account two factors. The first of them was political. It is eminently clear that the pogrom was not a spontaneous outbreak of mass insanity. It was prepared in advance and mounted with great care.

To recall, suddenly leaflets appeared throughout the country telling the story of the disappearance of Polish children, a not-so-subtle hint at the blood libel. A little Christian boy, who allegedly escaped from a Jewish basement and thereby miraculously saving himself from the hands of the Jews, was well couched and trained. Similarly, advance work was needed to assemble and train the hoodlums, and procure militiaman uniforms with the help of which the Jews in Kielce were deceived into handing in their weapons which they held by permission. Also, it came to light that the entire operation was doubtlessly planned and executed by a gang of thugs from the reactionary underground movement NSZ (National Armed Forces) and possibly even by the Polish Government-in-Exile in London, with the view of causing anarchy in the country by every means possible in order to bring about the removal of the left-wing government in Poland.

But there was also an additional factor which was brought into play in the bloody events in Kielce. It remains a sad fact that the masses of the Polish people are pervaded with a senseless, almost biological hatred toward the Jews. It is a bitter truth that after nearly six years of Nazi rule, in the modern era, a large city in the heart of Europe can in the twinkling of an eye be seized by a mass hysteria of the blood libel and turn into a medieval stage for witch-hunting, in which deranged residents hunt for innocent, orphaned and defenceless victims.

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The visit of Rabbi I.I. Herzog

The year 1946 was marked by frequent visits of Jewish leaders, community workers and journalists to Poland. The Jewish world was keen to obtain reliable information about current developments in Poland after the liberation, in general, and the fortunes of the surviving remnant in particular. Jews abroad wanted also to verify the information reaching the free world about the persecution of Jews by the Polish majority, including the murder of Jewish victims.

"Seeing is not like hearing," said Our Sages of Blessed Memory. Here are just a few of the names of our visitors: American journalists Siegal and Margoshes; emissaries of the Jewish Agency: Dr. Moshe Ishai, Dr. Itzhak Rafael, Dr. Yehuda-Leib Kurtz (Mizrahi), Dr. Zerah Warhaftig (Mizrahi); Rabbi Voliglertner on behalf of the Orthodox Relief Committee in the United States; representative of British Jewry, Rabbi Shlomo Schoenfeld, who also represented the Chief Rabbis Council; the well-known journalist Schneiderman, and many, many others.

Rabbi Shlomo Schoenfeld undertook great efforts to help our Committee of Religious Congregations both in funds for redeeming children and organizational needs, as well as shipments of food and clothing. At that time Jewish "repatriates" began returning from Russia; they were hungry, haggard-looking, their clothes in tatters. The Committee extended assistance to local communities throughout the country. In those days it meant a great deal.

One of the most important guests in the annals of the Committee of Religious Congregations after the war was the Chief Rabbi of the Land of Israel, the late Rabbi Itzhak Ayzik Halevi Herzog.

Following the example of great Jewish personages in our history,

Rabbi Herzog realized that after the tragedy of the Holocaust he was duty-bound to meet in person with the surviving remnant, to feel their sorrow, to convey words of comfort and condolences, and to ease their distress as much as possible.

Rabbi Herzog began his tour of Europe in February 1946. He was due to visit Italy, DP camps in Germany, and especially, Poland. In Italy he met with Pope Pius XII and asked him, among other things, to issue a pastoral letter to the Catholic clergy in Holland, Belgium, France and Poland asking them to help Jewish communities in searching after children rescued by Christians during the Holocaust, redeeming them and handing them over to Jews. However, Rabbi Herzog failed to achieve anything with the pope except words of friendship and empty promises. The pope did not issue a pastoral letter. Pius XII, who had filled his mouth with water during the Holocaust, continued his silence after the defeat of Hitler. Polish Cardinal Hlond certainly learned his lesson from the teacher.

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Rabbi Herzog arrived in Poland in the company of his son, Yaakov Herzog, in early July 1946. At that time the Jewish population was still reeling from the shock of the events in Kielce; the mood was one of anxiety and dejection. The honored guests were put up at the Polonia Hotel in Warsaw. I ensured that bodyguards accompany them everywhere they went.

Our first meeting with Rabbi Herzog took place in his hotel room. The welcoming ceremony was attended by the Board of the Rabbis Council and the Committee of Religious Congregations, including the Rabbi of

Wroclaw, Treistman; the Rabbi of Sosnowce-Bedzin, Issaschar Engelrad; and the Rabbi of Cracow, Moshe Steinberg. Rabbi Herzog's deportment, his noble countenance, his way of speaking, and his response to the report we had submitted to him left a powerful impression on us. He was moved to the depths of his soul and tears flowed from his eyes. It was clear to us that we were in the presence of a prince of the Law, a great Jewish personage with a sensitive Jewish heart.

Complying with Rabbi Herzog's wish we drew up the schedule of his visits in Poland and the list of requests he was to submit to the Polish Government. In his meetings with government officials Rabbi Herzog intended to demand the following: 1) to ease restrictions on Jewish emigration from the country; 2) to enact a law requiring the registration of every Jewish child sheltered by Christians during the Holocaust; 3) to take steps aimed at protecting the lives of the surviving remnant, especially in provincial towns.

I accompanied Rabbi Herzog in his meetings with the Prime Minister Osobka-Morawski, with the Director General of the Foreign Ministry, Olszewski, with the head of the Department of Jewish Affairs, Prof. Gorka and his assistant Szaniawski. Rabbi Herzog, who had met with famous personages throughout the world and was known for his dignified mien and tactful approach, left a powerful impression on his interlocutors. They promised to meet his requests concerning emigration of Jews and measures to protect them. However, they said, the Socialist government cannot handle matters such as law requiring registration of Jewish children living in Christian homes. They intimated that they were well aware of the practice of redeeming children both by the

Committee of Religious Congregations and the Zionist Organization, but said that it was an internal Jewish affair.

Herzog's meeting with the Director Director of the Foreign Ministry, Olszewski, was of particular interest. The man descended from a distinguished hassidic family and had adopted a Polish name. He went out of his way to convince Rabbi Herzog that in pressing for Jewish emigration from Poland at the present time Zionist organizations were making a big mistake, since never in Poland had Jews enjoyed such good living conditions and such opportunities for development as they enjoyed under the present liberal system in Poland. This notwithstanding, Olszewski claimed, his Ministry made sure that every Jew who sought to emigrate would receive a passport. The only hitch was that the main passport office was in Warsaw, under the control of the Foreign Ministry. The pressure on this office was great and its officials had not yet managed to meet the great demand for passports on the part of Jews.

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On the eve of his departure we arranged a magnificent farewell party for Rabbi Herzog in the great hall of the Committee of Religious Congregations at 6 Twarda Street. It took place on August 12, 1946, and was attended by representatives of all the Zionist organizations in Poland, rabbis and representatives of organized communities. Huge crowds filled the hall and the hallways. Present were representatives of all the Jewish institutions in Poland, with the notable exception of the Central Committee of Jews in Poland. Their anti-Zionist and anti-religious ideology prevented them from attending a farewell party in

honor of the Chief Rabbi of the Land of Israel.

At this point I would like to quote the full text of a long speech I delivered in honor of Rabbi Herzog, as it reflects the views, feelings, and thinking of a great many Jews at that time in Poland:

"The Jewish presence in the Vistula country is one thousand years old. Within this long span Jews had sent down deep roots in the Polish land, and the roots spread and grew.

"The Jewish presence in Poland goes back longer than in any other country of Exile, and the Jewish people had reached a great splendor. This splendor would have continued to grow if it were not cut down by the horrendous national tragedy of 1939.

"Jewish genius manifested itself in every sphere of life in Poland. At the dawn of Jewish history in the country, Jews assumed the task of reviving the trade and crafts so needed in a rural country burdened with antiquated feudal system. For this purpose did Polish rulers invite the Jews to their country. But with the passage of time Polish Jews manifested their talents and intelligence in other areas as well, in economics, in politics, in science.

"Polish Jews developed strong bonds to this country. They became attached to the Polish land and grew to love it.

"The traditional Jewry, the good old Judaism of Jews adhering to Jewishness all the days of the year, the observant Jews fluorished gracefully on the land of Poland.

"After the decline of Jewish life in countries of Exile such as Spain, Portugal, and Germany, Poland became the permanent abode of traditional Jewry. An extensive network of study houses spread far and

wide throughout Polish cities and towns. The voice of the Law came forth from the windows of Jewish houses. There was a Jewish street, a Jewish milieu, Jewish life!

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"Polish Jewry engendered spiritual giants of the magnitude of Rabbi Shlomo Luria ("Maharshal" - a 15th century talmudist), Shabbtai Cohen (author of a 17th century commentary on Shulkhan Arukh), Rabbi Moshe Isserlish (a 16th century halakhist), Turi-Zahav, the Vilna Gaon, the Baal Shem Tov, the great hassidic gaonim, and many others.

"Such famous communities as the Jerusalem of Lithuania (Vilno), Lublin, Cracow, Lvov, Warsaw, and many others radiated their light to distant places.

"The Law went forth from there, the voice of Jacob went forth, Jewish morality and our prophets' teachings reached the world.

"Scores of Jews received their words and brought them to their homes.

"Generation upon generation wove the tapestry of Jewish life in Poland--the life of the prosaic week and the holy Sabbath, everyday life of chores and the joy of holydays and festivals. A Jewish way of life came into being, Jewish everyday customs and mores, as well as traditions of holy days. Jewish folk melodies and songs were born, lamentations, Jewish dances.

"Only Polish Jewry could give birth to a broad, popular movement of Hassidism which captured the hearts and minds of tens of thousands of Jews.

"They recited psalms, gave for charity which, as the saying goes,

saves from death, attended funerals, celebrated weddings, listened to klezmers playing, and danced as prescribed by law, year in, year out, generation upon generation.

"As the love of the Jews for the Polish land grew, so did their devotion toward it, and their willingness to sacrifice even their lives for their Polish homeland. And, in fact, we witnessed examples of Jewish heroism on various occasions in history, when Poland called upon them to join the ranks of its loyal sons to fight "for your freedom and ours!"...

"The Jews never hestitated in responding to the call to arms. They were always the first in the country's struggle against the common enemy, whether from the east, from Tzarist Russia, or from the west, from Prussia.

"This wellspring of devotion and sacrifice brought forth figures such as Berek Yoselewicz, Rabbi Maizlish and many other heroes, as well as thousands of known and anonymous Jewish fighters who fell defending Poland in the Warsaw uprising of 1944...

"In the course of time the Jews in Poland created their own literature in Yiddish and Hebrew. Yiddish, the mame loshen [mother tongue], spoken by millions, became a European language.

"Parallel with the traditional way of life, a Jewish secular culture grew by leaps and bounds: a network of publishing houses, a profusion of Jewish newspapers, libraries, an excellent Yiddish theater.

"Jewish street throbbed with the authentic life of Polish Jewry. The words of Jewish writers reached a wide audience. Peretz, Ash,

Weissberg, and the entire pleiade of Jewish writers and poets, all of whom lived and created under Polish skies. In Shalom Ash's writings the Polish landscape takes on Jewish coloring. In his books the Vistula murmurs in Yiddish... Against the background of the mountains and forests of Poland we behold characters from Y.L. Peretz, the heroes of Hassidish and Folkstimliche Geschichtn. The poems of Jewish poets reverberate with the hidden, subtle melancholy of the golden Polish autumn...

"It always seemed to us that Jews and Poles share a common language, that the two peoples were bound with bonds of traditional friendship, living together under the same sky, breathing the same air. Whenever Jew-haters appeared among the Poles, who persecuted us and sought to destroy us, we tried to belittle this phenomenon, interpreting it as a passing "episode"... After all, not all the Poles were evil! Not everyone of them was the oppressor of the Jews! We were not overly concerned with characters such as Nowaczynski [an anti-Semitic writer] or Trzeciak [an anti-Semitic priest] which kept cropping up throughout history. We could always comfort ourselves with such noble-minded figures as Eliza Orzeszkowa [a Polish writer].

"And then came September 1, 1939, ushering in the era of horror.

"As always in critical times of Polish history, Jews joined the ranks of the Polish army by the thousands. Jewish workers, merchants, and intelligentsia could be seen everywhere defending Warsaw. Men and women, big and small, joined in the effort to dig trenches for the anti-aircraft guns. Among them I saw distinguished rabbis and well-known writers, hard at work, shovels in hand. Jews and Poles worked

together; the danger forged common bonds: "For Your Freedom and Ours."

"But the stream of brown lava was too powerful. Poland entered the grim night of the Nazi occupation. Polish Jews were thrown into ghettoes. Before long the smokestacks of German ovens rose up to the sky.

"Polish Jews were engulfed by the maelstrom of ghastly madness, which visited upon them destruction and death...

"The ovens of Majdanek, Treblinka, and Auschwitz (Oswiecim) were doing their fiendish work day and night. Long trainloads of victims rolled incessantly from the ghettoes to the death factories. The ashes that remained of Jewish life covered Polish soil.

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"Polish sky was thick with choking clouds of smoke belched forth by the high oven chimneys. This smoke poisoned not only the lungs but the Polish minds as well. The Nazi venom seeped everywhere, befuddling minds of people. Parallel with noble-minded acts of fraternal help and devotion on the part of individual Poles who rendered assistance to the Jewish victims, sizable sections of the Polish public stooped to such dastardly acts as denounciation and treachery, thereby helping the brown henchmen in exterminating the Polish Jewry.

"During the heroic uprising of the Warsaw ghetto, when hell's flames rising up from the ghetto blotted out the sun, those Nazism-infected Poles stood at a distance, looking on with mixed feelings of joy and sadness: joy over the destruction of the Jews, and sadness over the destruction of the buildings. Too bad, they, the Poles could have taken possession of the houses of the Jews...

"But the evil shall never reign for long! The time of judgement must come!

"The time had come for the brown henchmen to pay for their heinous deeds!

"Ultimately, the hordes of the Nazi taskmasters had been dealt irrevocable defeat. The haughty victors of yesterday lost out. The "master race" has been brought low and the enslaved nations could finally breathe and feel the taste of victory!

"The Polish army took part in these decisive battles. Thousands of Jewish soldiers serving in its ranks fell in combat on the victorious march from Lenino [first battle of the Soviet-sponsored Polish army with the Germans] to Berlin. This was the Jewish contribution to the final struggle "for our freedom and yours"!

"The Nazi beast uprooted six million martyrs from our midst. Three million and two hundred thousand of them were Polish Jews.

"The brightest star in the galaxy of Jewish communities, the heart of the people, Polish Jewry, was snuffed out. A glorious chapter in Jewish history, "the Polish era," came to an end. Graveyards is all that remains of hundreds of communities once throbbing with Jewish life; and even the graveyards have been looted and desecrated.

"Immediately after the liberation Jewish remnants began returning to Polish cities; Jews from the bunkers, from the woods, from partisan camps, from east and west, from Russian steppes and from camps in Germany. Rejected, orphaned and mourning they came. Jews who slipped the henchman's noose by sheer miracle. These lonely people--how pitifully few they were!--returned to the former ghettoes, wandering

among the ruins as if trying to find the shadows of the past...

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"But these broken and worn-out remnants could not even find the grave on which they could shed a tear... Ashes was all that remained of their loved and dear ones... Wind was blowing these ashes away, scattering them over Polish fields... Where could a Jew go to find his fathers' grave?

*

"What was a Polish-Jewish survivor likely to think, what could have he thought, before returning to his homeland?

"Under ordinary circumstances and according to every moral and rational principle, every Jew in the place of his exile had the right right to dream of being greeted with warmth and friendliness by his Polish fellow citizens upon his return; after all, Jews had been partners in building the country, had rallied to battle at each and every critical time and had borne sacrifices like the rest of their compatriots. They had devoted their hearts and minds, their strength and industry to enrich the land, to further its spritual and material prosperity in all spheres of life. And now, when such an unmitigated disaster had struck Polish Jewry, leaving a handful of survivors...

"This what every surviving Jew was likely to think.

"But what did really happen?

"The enmity and hatred which today we observe among the Poles toward the few Jewish survivors is without equal. How abominable was the welcome extended by them to these unfortunate few who returned!

"This behavior cannot be reconciled with any moral or rational principle. Nonetheless, it does take place. We are duty-bound to proclaim this truth to the whole world: large sections of the Polish people harbor hostility and hatred toward us. Some express it in words, others in meaningful glances in the street or in the tramcar, and still others by means of a long knife, Kielce, etc.

"To say it once again, part of the Polish people comprises honest Poles, progressive Poles, Poles upholding humanitarian ideals. The new Polish government was drawn from such Poles. Let us admit openly: without this government the Kielce events would have been occuring every day in Poland. How many days would be needed to liquidate the hundred and twenty thousand remaining Jews? No death industry would be needed to accomplish this task...

"We saw that the Polish pupils of Hitler did not lag behind their teachers in brown as far as methods were concerned. Kielce served as good an example of this as any...

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"A crowd of Poles lynched some 70 Jews. They used iron bars, spars of wood, stones, knives, anything they could lay their hands on. They cut open bellies of pregnant women, bashed in heads of infants. They displayed skills that Hofmann, the sadist of Majdanek, could hardly be ashamed of.

"What use to us is the death sentence handed down by the court against the Polish murderers? Will it bring our martyrs back from the dead?

"What is the meaning of our lives in the face of such savage

hatred, such consuming hostility?

"Bullet may strike the Jew on every road. While travelling by train the Jew is never free of fear: will the train be stopped? Will they drag him by his feet from the train, and that'll be the end of it?...

"Despite its good intentions--and we believe them--the Polish Government cannot provide a guard armed with a submachine gun to every travelling Jew.

"Some Poles ask us :"What have you survived for?" Had we, the surviving remnant, the question implies, perished too, the Jewish question would have been completely solved!

"The vision, more than that, the prospect of Poland without Jews has virtually intoxicated them.

"These Poles, bereft of any conscience, keep saying this at every opportunity. Who among the Jews who had spent Nazi occuppation hiding out on the "Aryan" side had not heard at one time or another some Poles saying: "Say what you will about Hitler, but there is one good thing he has done: he solved the Jewish question in Poland. He surely deserves a memorial for this."

"This is how things are. This is the appearance of the "Jewish question" in Poland.

"The behavior of the Catholic world characterizes well the current mood in the country. The Catholic clergy, the preachers of the Catholic ethics of loving one's neighbor, fill their mouth with water whenever the subject of Jews is brought up. When Jewish blood flowed in the streets of Kielce they were nowhere to be seen, nowhere to be found. Their silence in the face of the murder gave encouragement to the

deranged mob.

"The Catholic leader, Cardinal Hlond, did not issue any proclamation to the people, despite the pleas addressed to him on this matter by progressive segments of the public.

"The question of why the Poles behave this way and not another should be left to psychologists. Only psychopathology can explain this obsession.

"Will the Polish people ever recover from this disease? Will it sober úp from this intoxication one day? Who knows. Should the Jews remain on the Polish soil which is burning their feet, and wait for better times? Waiting could conceivably lead to the solution of the "Jewish question" a la Hitler and his Polish disciples.

"What is the way out of this dilemma?

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"Polish Jews have already found an answer to this question: emigration! Camps of Jewish refugees in Germany, Austria, and Italy attest to this.

"Remnants of Polish Jewry, the vestiges of millions, of such resplendent community, trudge along every road, sneak through every border.

"Lonely, dejected and broken in spirit the Jews part from the land bound with them for generations. A paltry knapsack slung over the shoulder is all that remains of their possessions, of houses and businesses. Bereft of their dear and loved ones they remained only to wander through the world created by God.

"The Jew is forced to leave Poland, but he has no goal to strive

for. Where should he go and for what purpose? What is he to expect in his new wanderings? The gates of every country are shut tight. The world at large remains estranged, cool and indifferent to the fate of the unfortunates. Thousands of the fleeing Jews have neither relative nor guardian nor friend anywhere.

"After years of horror and destruction a new tragic chapter opens up before them!

"Even more painful is the fact that in the year 1946, the Land of Israel, the land of the Jews, remains hermetically sealed before the Jews. There, on the shores of the Mediterranean, the British "Socialist" Government pursues its imperialist games... For the sake of its "bases" and expansion, England is prepared to drown the whole world in blood. What does it care for homeless Jews, who have nothing to hope for in this world? What business is it of hers that the homeless people have been yearning for generations for its land, its historical homeland?

"The Land of Israel remains sealed exactly at the moment it can provide comfort for its forlorn children, victims for savage hatred and loathing.

"Cry out, people of Israel! Raise up your voice to awaken the conscience of the indifferent world!

"Cry out people of Israel! The world owes you a great debt. Settle the score with the world!

"And you Jews, our brethren on every continent! Reach out for the abandoned Polish Jews, the last remnants of this imposing epic whose name is Polish Jewry. Help us to deliver them from peril, from the jaws

of disaster. Help them as long as there is still time! Help them in their new exile, new foreign lands. Help them to reach the shores of deliverance, the shores of the longed-for country, awaiting its exiled children! There they would be able to pitch tents, and shoulder-to-shoulder with their Jewish brethren build a Jewish life, a Jewish existence, without mean hatred, without graves, without the murdered victims of Kielce.

"The Jews embarking on the voyage of wanderings are parting from the Polish land. Farewell, Poland! We leave behind us the graveyards, the scattered ashes of our martyrs on your fields. They will serve as a reminder, which perhaps will disturb your rest sometimes...

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This is how my speech ended. At the farewell party we handed to Rabbi Herzog a Torah scroll we had unearthed in the rubble of the Warsaw ghetto. Some of the parchment sheets were stained with blood. Apparently the Jew who tried to salvage the scroll from fire was shot, and, while pressing the scroll to his heart, his blood spilled and stained many parchment sheets.

In what follows I quote the text of the cover letter enclosed to the bloodstained Torah scroll:

"On the second Sabbath, on the fifteenth day of the month of Ab, the month of comfort, the year five thousand seven hundred and six of the creation of the world, in Warsaw, the capital of Poland, this letter was written and sent by the remnant of Polish Jewry to their brethren in Zion.

"The ways of Polish Jewry do mourn, all her gates are desolate,

most its sons and daughters had perished in the fiery ovens, and turned into mounds of ashes driven by the winds across the country. Polish Jewry remembered in the days of her affliction and her miseries all the pleasant things that it had in the days of old, when its people fell into the hand of the enemy, and none did help her: the adversaries saw her, and mocked at her sabbaths. She came down wonderfully, she has no comforter. O Lord, behold our affliction, for the enemy has magnified himself.

"Some eight hundred fluorishing communities in Poland have ceased to exist in time of affliction and destruction. Only a handful remain, one in the city and two of the family. Our labor, the labor of generations fell prey to plunder; our synagogues, our study houses, our houses of learning, our libraries were laid waste and consumed by fire. Our Torah books, the books of our holy men were trampled upon and squashed by the haughty feet of the accursed Nazi taskmasters. Our spiritual treasures created and assembled by generations became a free game for every son of Belial to despoil and ravage as he saw fit. Polish Jewry was crushed by the wheels of history gone beserk. A magnificent spiritual inheritance was lost to Israel.

"Among the holy relics of these treasures strewn about our country there is one particular Torah scroll, stained with pure Jewish blood, spilt in the days of trouble and iniquity by the angels of destruction doing the will of Hitler, may his name be blotted out. We chose this book, signed as it is with the martyrs' blood, as the symbol of the grevious torments of the Polish Jewry, to be passed on to you for eternal keeping, our dear brothers in Zion, for we know the measure of

your grief and the depth of your sorrow at the Holocaust and breavement which afflicted us.

"In the presence of the representative of Polish Jewry, of Hebrew organizations in the country, we representatives of the Committee of Religious Congregations in Poland, are handing to you this day, in the name of millions of martyrs of our people, this Torah scroll to the hands of the representative of the Jewry of the Land of Israel, Chief Rabbi, Itzhak Ayzik Halevi Herzog, may he live long and happily, Amen.

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"The lament of those led to slaughter rustles among the parchments of this book, baptized in the blood of luckless brethren. The moans of the afflicted and the battlecry of the ghetto fighters reverberates among its lines. Feast your eyes on this doleful document and may it give you some picture of the temple of suffering of the Jewish people in Poland, the remembrance of the destruction of Israel of old in this country.

Signed on behalf of the Committee of Religious Congregations
and the Rabbis Council
Rabbi Dr. David Kahane
Rabbi Moshe Steinberg
Pinchas Rafalowicz

Rabbi Herzog managed to visit Lodz with its large religious community. He met with observant Jews there and delivered homilies on halacha and aggadah. However the climax of his visit was leading 500 children, most of them orphans, out of Poland to France, where they

were to remain until the Mandate Government would allow them in the Land of Israel. Needless to say, the task of gathering the children and their transportation was assumed by the Committee of Religious Congregations and the good-natured Captain Drucker who accompanied his charges to the Polish-Czech border.

The last gesture of Rabbi Herzog prior to his departure from Poland was to send a cable with warm thanks to the Bishop of Czestochowa Kubina, who had strongly denounced the Kielce pogrom. Bishop Kubina was the only Polish clergyman who dared to condemn in public the instigators and perpetrators of the ill-famed pogrom in Kielce.

Flight

For many Polish Jews the Kielce riots was the straw the broke the camel's back; it prompted them to leave the country, to flee from hell. However, viewing Kielce and other anti-Semitic incidents as the only factor which caused the flight of Polish Jews, would amount to a sin of omission toward history. Shortly after the liberation, in November-December 1944, in the shelter house in Lublin at 3 Wiszynski Street I saw groups of Jews whispering to each other in secret, discussing the possibilities of leaving the country: How can one cross the border, how to reach the Land of Israel? It is impossible, the argument went, to build Jewish life here in Poland, this huge graveyard of Polish Jewry? Even if the Polish Government promises wonders, we must not prop up our crumbling habitations here. And if leave we must, then only to the Land of Israel.

At first there was a kind of mass desire, I would even say, craze to get out of Poland. This impulse sparked off a magnificent movement, led by no one, organized by no one, not even by the Zionist propaganda. The goal was the Land of Israel. This movement commenced long before Kielce and received a great boost with the return of repatriates from the Soviet Union. Jews began "stealing" across the borders on their own initiative, sneaking through clandestinely, going to Roumania, Austria, Greece and then to Italy. They pretended to be Greek or Romanian repatriates returning to their homes after the war.

When this movement of flight assumed proportions which could be concealed no longer, emissaries from the Land of Israel arrived and took over with the help of the Zionist Organization of Poland. They were: Issar Ben-Zvi, Zvi Netzer, Yhanan Cohen, and Tuvia Cohen, as well as our comrades in Poland.

Two distinct periods in the history of flight can be discerned: from November 1944 to July 1946, and from July 1946 to the end of 1947. The Polish Government turned a blind eye on this venture; it understood the situation of the Jews, sympathized with them and refrained from hampering the flight. It is also not inconceivable that some of the Polish leaders welcomed the flight, on the assumption that it was better for the Jews and for themselves as well.

On July 30, 1946, a tacit agreement was reached between the leadership of the flight movement and the Polish Government; Antek Zukerman served as intermediary. The Polish side agreed to allow Jews to leave the country without any restrictions, on the following conditions: 1) The agreement would be kept secret; 2) Precautions would

be taken to ensure that no Poles opposing the current regime leave the country disguised as departing Jews; 3) No hard currency would be smuggled out of the country; 4) The flight would be conducted as an organized movement and not a panicked escape.

Tens of thousands of Jews left Poland in this way. In my estimate, without the flight movement, between sixty to seventy thousand Jews would have remained in Poland until this day. The flight routes were various and passed through such border-crossing points as Klodzko, Szczecin, Walbrzych, Fridland. The Polish Frontier Protéction Corps (Korpus Obrony Pogranicza) was given orders to let everybody through and refrain from clashes with organizers of the flight.

Needles to say, for its part the Committee of Religious Congregations rendered assistance to ease the pain of the escapees. I called a meeting of heads of communities throughout the country and instructed them to endorse the flight in synagogues and study houses. The endorsements, however, could not be made openly since as a legal body, recognized by the Government, we were prevented from getting involved publicly in affairs such as this. At the same time, however, members of our Executive who were also members of the Zionist Federation, collaborated closely with the organizers of the flight movement. In particular, our Mizrahi members worked hard among the communities for this purpose.

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All at once and unwillingly I got involved in the flight movement. In early August 1946 I received a telephone call from the office of Defence Minister, General Zymierski, who told me to report to his

office the same day. Speaking in a grave tone he informed me that according to information in his possession, Jewish officers and soldiers not yet discharged from the Polish army were taking part in the flight movement. According to law they were deserters and the whole affair was stirring anti-Semitic sentiments in the army. He said that he sympathized with the situation of the Jews and understood the predicament of those seeking to leave the country, and would not press for court-martialing them. However, Jewish officers and soldiers who wish to leave Poland must be discharged from the army first.

After lengthy conversation in the course of which the General again manifested his friendly attitude to the Jews and their problems, he made me an offer, which, as a matter of fact, had already been drafted earlier and was now resting on his table: Jewish officers and soldiers seeking to leave Poland were to turn to the Army Rabbinate. Although no official order to that effect could be published, "You," the General added with a smile, "will find a way to reach them."

I did find the way. I instructed synagogues and study houses to make it known that a possibility exists to get discharged from the army.

Where did the Polish Jews go?

Most went to Germany, to the American and British occupation zones. The British did everything they could to hamper emigration. Bevin enacted his draconian statutes, shut the gates of the Land of Israel, and regarded the refugees reaching the British occupation zone in Germany as terrorists. The British press determined that Jews were leaving Poland wihtout any reason, while the Polish Government was

interested in having them stay in the country. But nothing helped and Jews kept streaming incessantly to the British, American, and even French occupation zones.

The greatest number of people flocked to the American zone. By and large the Americans displayed considerable tolerance, but when all camps were full and congestion became ubiquitous, General Patton turned back three transports. The situation became complicated and the flight movement appeared to be on the verge of discontinuation. At this point, however, Rabbi Phillip Bernstein appeared on the scene.

In April 1946, the Chief Rabbi of the American Army, Phillip Bernstein was appointed advisor on Jewish affairs to the commander of American forces, General Eisenhauer. Rabbi Bernstein understood well the causes of the flight movement and requested that the American High Command allow Polish Jews into Germany without restrictions.

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At the end of July 1946, he arrived in Poland in the company of his comrade, Army Rabbi Herbert Friedman. He decided to acquaint himself first-hand with the situation so as to be able to submit an objective report on the current situation in the country. Upon his arrival he held series of meetings with representatives of all organizations and institutions, with social and political leaders, with people on the street, and with rabbis. He went first to Lower Silesia where he met with representatives of the Central Committee of Jews in Poland and with ordinary Jews. He also met with the Rabbi of Wroclaw who also served as the Rabbi of all Lower Silesia, Shalom Treistman. The late Rabbi Treistman, who at that time did not intend yet to leave Poland,

told his guest that Jews in Lower Silesia did not plan to join the flight movement and would remain in Poland.

Rabbi Bernstein stayed in Poland for ten days, visited all the major cities and met with great many Jews. In the middle of August he arrived to Warsaw and met with me. He opened our meeting by saying the following: "The Central Committee [of Jews in Poland] who are the official representatives of Polish Jews want the Jews to remain in the country. Rabbi Treistman, an interesting rabbinical figure, is of the same opinion. On the other hand, Zionist Jews and ordinary folk believe that Jews should leave Poland. I would like to hear your views and I hope that you will observe the injuction "put not a stumbling block before the blind."

I described the situation in realistic and objective terms. On the one hand, I said, during the occupation large sections of the Polish population had gotten accustomed to the fact that Jews were a free game for everyone; on the other hand, the Polish government showed benevolent attitude to the Jewish surviving remnant. Our knowledge of the Polish people is not of recent origin; after all we have lived next to them for nearly a thousand years. Governments change but the people remains the same. The surviving remnant emerged wounded in body and in spirit from the great disaster, and we must heal our wounds. It is better for the masses of Jews to build new home elsewhere, far away from this immense Jewish graveyard the name of which is Poland. We hope that the way to the Land of Israel leads through Germany. I believe, I said, that it is your duty to prevail on the American authorities to open the gates before Jewish refugees and recognize them as displaced

persons.

Rabbi Bernstein kept his word. It is to be noted that members of the Central Committee of Jews in Poland, particularly the Bundists played an ugly part in this affair by waging a comprehensive propaganda campaign against "the panic called flight." Nearly every week the organ of the Central Committee Das Neue Lebn and the Bund organ in Poland Unzer Shtimme published articles denouncing the panic of leaving Poland. They warned their readers against the disasters awaiting them in the camps in Germany, against epidemics, and against uncertain future at the time Poland was opening its gates wide before the surviving remnant.

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One of the most forceful opponents of the flight movement was Director General of the Foreign Ministry Olszewski. He demanded that Polish borders be hermetically sealed and that no Jew be allowed to leave the country. The Party and the Government, however, did not share this view.

In late 1946 the flow of emigration slowed down considerably. Disturbing news began arriving from Germany about congestion in the camps there. Most would-be-emigrants were disappointed by the firm anti-Jewish stance taken by the British government which shut the gates of the Land of Israel.

In the fall of 1946 the Polish government made public its views on the flight movement. Its announcement was printed in Das Neue Lebn, no. 33(58), September 9, 1946.

Polish Government wants the Jews to remain in the country

An important announcement of the Prime Minister, Osobka-Morawski, Warsaw, September 18, 1946.

"The Prime Minister granted a special interview to the Jewish journalist P. Novik. Regarding the situation of Jews in Poland the Prime Minister said the following:

"Polish Government goes to great lengths to facilitate issuing passports to the Jews seeking to emigrate. At the same time, however, we want to make it clear that the Government wants the Jews to remain in the country, to help with the task of rebuilding it and build their own lives. Never in the history of Jews in Poland had they so many opportunities as they do now. The emigration panic is harmful. The anti-Semitic hoodlums draw encouragement from this movement. The NSZ [National Armed Forces - an extreme right-wing anti-Semitic organization] believes that if attacks against the Jews lead to the flight of thousands, so much the better."

The Prime Minister added that he understood the desire of Jews to emigrate in order to join their relatives but he regretted the fact that Jews were "sitting on their suitcases." The Government will not interfere with emigration, he said. Let the Jews themselves decide.

I drew my information about the flight movement from personal contacts with escapees. At the same time I had access to official information which came from three reliable sources with which I maintained contact in my capacity as chairman of the Committee of Religious Congregations and the Chief Rabbi of the Army. They were as follows: General Rola-Zymierski, who revealed to me the tacit agreement concluded between the Polish Government and the leadership of the

flight movement; Head of Military Intelligence, General Komar, a warm-hearted Jew, even though he never admitted to being Jewish; Director of the Department of Religions of the Interior Ministry, Jaroslaw Demianczuk. The government agencies they represented showed sincere attitude to Jewish religious institutions, and despite the negative attitude of the Central Committee of Jews in Poland toward our Committee of Religious Congregations, they informed us about every matter concerning Jews and their problems.

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All three believed that the proclamation of the Prime Minister Osobka-Morawski was sincere, objective and issued at the right time. Although Poland was interested in Jews staying in the country and helping with its reconstruction, they understood the uneasiness of the Jews and the psychological background of mass emigration.

The last sentence in the Prime Minister's declaration was of particular interest: "The Government will not interfere with emigration, let the Jews themselves decide." This could be construed to mean that although Poland was interested in Jews remaining in the country, the authorities did not intend to go out of their way to make them stay, and the Jews would decide what's best for them. On the basis of my acquaintance with both sides, I would add: "It is better for both of them."

On January 19, 1947, general elections took place in Poland. The anti-government forces sustained crushing defeat and the Polish Workers Party won by a landslide. New winds began blowing in the country. Although the flight movement continued until early 1948, by that time

it had slowed down to a trickle. Emigration of Jews from Poland became an official affair. A Jew seeking to emigrate was required to submit an application like every other citizen to the Foreign Ministry, which processed each application on an individual basis. A Jew stood a better chance of obtaining passport if he enclosed two documents to his application: a certificate of the Central Committee of Jews in Poland or the Committee of Religious Congregations confirming that he was, in fact, a Jew, and, second, a promise of a foreign country (promessa) to grant entry visa to the applicant.

The Main Passport Office of the Foreign Ministry was located at Szucha Street. At first it was headed by Mrs. Czekanska assisted by small clerical staff. The small staff could hardly cope with the flood of Jewish applications. The promessa was very difficult to secure. Not every country was willing to issue such a document. Jews found a solution by obtaining large numbers of them from a certain South American country. In this way emigration continued in slow pace until the summer of 1948, when the state of Israel was established and the its embassy was opened in Warsaw.

The first consul general of the State of Israel in Warsaw was Dr. Carmel. Already in the first days of the Embassy's activities in the capital I gave a truthful account of the situation to Dr. Carmel and revealed to him and to the Ambassador Barzilai the secret of promessas. Dr. Carmel opened the doors wide to every Jew who sought to obtain the document. Thus the situation improved in this respect, but the pressure and congestion in the small Main Passport Office continued.

This state of affairs lasted until the end of summer of 1949, when

the Polish Government decided to allow mass legal emigration of Jews from the country.

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The Committee of Religious Congregations in the Years 1947-1948

The activities of the Committee of Congregations during this period were marked by two contradictory tendencies: consolidation and constructive work on the one hand, and flight and emigration on the other.

The first phase, covering the period of 1945-1946, was marked primarily by work of reconstruction and reorganization. These were the years of making demands, of awakening, of remembrance. The task of instilling the sense of Jewishness in the hearts of Polish Jews was by no means easy in those years of despair and indifference immediately after the Holocaust. The Central Committee of Religious Congregations, as well as individual religious communities were already in existence as officially recognized bodies. Gradually we organized and built an extensive network of religious communities throughout the country. Eighty six such communities came into being over the first two years.

The second phase, covering the years 1947-1948, was the stage of consolidation. The communities, recently established with great effort, began to consolidate, grow in strength, and expand their jurisdiction. Scattered throughout the country they began forming ties with the Jewish world abroad, and even entertain hopes of building country-wide religious educational system. The headquarters of the Committee of Religious Congregations were located in Warsaw, in the only synagogue which miraculously escaped destruction, at 6 Twarda Street. Nazis had

turned it into a stable. On Passover eve, 1945, Jewish soldiers from the First Polish Division helped me to clean up the building. From the pitiful budget of the Army Rabbinate I appropriated funds to install windows and doors, as well as to purchase some benches and tables. Before long the house at 6 Twarda Street became widely known as the center of the Jewish religious autonomous community; one could even say, it became an address for the entire Jewry of Poland. In fact, it still is. The few existing religious communities were not alone; they were backed by a serious institution which managed things, issued instructions and accomplished the achievements as it did in the years 1944-1948.

In late January 1948, during the ceremony of opening the offices of the Committee of Religious Congregations at 6 Twarda Street (built with the generous help of the JOINT), a simple Jew, representative of one of the communities rose from his chair and asked me: "Tell me, rabbi Kahane, for what purpose do you build communities here? Jews are leaving Poland and is it worth it to build something for those who remain?"

Not a single member of any of the 86 communities, including us, heads of the Committee of Religious Congregations, asked himself this question: "For whom do we build? After all, Jews are leaving Poland!"

If I were asked this question today, if I were called to give an accurate and vivid portrait of the prevailing mood and thinking among massess of Jews in Poland those days, I would give the following account of thoughts, views, and mood current among the majority of the surviving remnant:

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In those days Polish Jews, religious and secular, intellectuals and ordinary people, were fully aware of the fact that Polish Jewry whose fluorishing and diverse culture had been nourishing world Jewry for generations, had ceased to exist as a creative and dynamic collectivity. All that remained of Jewish towns and villages were shadows, a remnant of the rich, creative and enterprizing Jewish past in Poland.

Some 50,000 Jews returned to Poland from bunkers, hideouts, and concentration camps. Some 170,000 returned from the vast spaces of the Soviet Union as repatriates. No detailed figures existed, but a popular estimate put the total number of Polish Jews after the war at 220,000. Many of them were worn-out, suffering from the effects of back-breaking labor, despairing, yet clinging to life. An unspoken question kept issuing from their mouths: What has happened here, where should we go? Material conditions and moral climate prevailing in Poland at the time only underscored the urgency of finding a solution to the problems besetting daily lives of the survivors. The democratic Polish government showed great understanding and sympathy for the problems of the new Jewish community in Poland. Heads of the Central Committee of Jews in Poland, particularly some of the Bundists among them, tried to entice the public by painting a rosy picture of the new, fluorishing Jewish community. Masses of Jews, however, realized that here, on the Polish soil, no solution to their problems can be expected, the good will of the government of democratic Poland notwithstanding. Any assistance rendered them here amounted to a provisional solution only.

Chastened by excruciating ordeals, they reckoned their situation with uncommon lucidity and depth. They had enough of living everywhere as a national minority, of serving as scapegoat for every social upheaval, of being uprooted by every storm. They had enough of meeting stares reminding them of Kielce. Only the naive among them believed that with the defeat of Hitler's Germany anti-Semitism would vanish completely, or at least assume a "human face." No less mistaken were those who thought that some proportional relation existed between the strength of anti-Semitism and the number of Jews in Poland. Nearly three and a half million Jews disappeared, but did Jew-hatred disappear as well? There were also weak Jews, the assimilationists who counted on their Aryan papers, and decided to get rid once and for all of their origins, to convert in order to put an end to their troubles. How foolish and naive they were; their Polish neighbors knew very well their identities. Their Jewishness was bound to pursue them to the tenth generation.

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It was only to be expected that Jews in Poland in those days could not and did not want to continue living under such circumstances. The mass emigration of Polish Jews which we witnessed in those days differed completely from all previously known cases of Jewish flight. No pursuit of success or easy profits, no romantic adventures drove the elderly, the infants, the orphans, mothers nursing children, to embark on uncertain voyage, across "green" borders, foreign countries, stormy seas. The overwhelming majority of them regarded the Land of Israel as their only refuge. There waited for them a new life, a future.

No one in particular encouraged emigration. As if on cue, a signal given silently by a leader of the nation, or by historical necessity, everyone seemed to follow the impulse telling them "arise and go," by joining the ranks of "exodus from Poland." Life itself stimulated this process, the surrounding reality engendered the powerful impulse to find a home, to feel solid ground under one's feet and a roof over one's head, a roof which does not cave in at every opportunity.

Furthermore, there existed a deep connection between "Polish exodus" and the scores of ships bearing new immigrants, which tried to reach the shores of the Land of Israel at that time.

This, however, represented but one aspect of the dynamics of Polish Jewry at that time. There was another aspect as well. The responsible leaders of the Committee of Religious Congregations, as well as the Rabbis' Council realized that it would be a great mistake to abandon those Jews who remained in Poland for various reasons.

Who were the remaining Jews? They comprised dreamers who envisioned a fluorishing Jewish community, assimilated Jews, "Aryan Jews," as well as great many Jews who lacked courage and strength to pick up again the staff of wanderings, to take to the road again, to live the life of a sojourner, a transient. Regardless of who they were, of their numbers, they were to be counted among the Jewish people. We understood that Jews would continue living in Poland not because they were fated to play some "messianic" part, and not because someone wished them to do so, but because the phenomenon accorded with the hidden order of things. In the course of time Jewish centers would come into being in large cities, perhaps Jewish youth would call for the establishment of

Jewish educational institutions, for books, etc. Certainly, one could not expect that a vibrant Jewish national existence would reappear in Poland, the handful of observant Jews would not engender great Torah scholars, no study houses would be formed, but at least there would be longing for Jewish speech, for Jewish intonations, for Jewish daily life, Jewish tradition, Jewish customs, and Jewish way of life.

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I concluded my greetings on the occasion of opening the new house of the Committee of Religious Congregations with these words:

"Although most Jews will go from here to the Land of Israel, while a few others will go to other countries, tens of thousands of Jews will remain in Poland. As long as there is one Jew in Poland whose heart is open for the Jewish religion, Jewish tradition, a Jew who believes in God and His Law, a Jew who has not severed the last tie linking him with us, it is only proper that we shall organize a community for him. He will feel there at home, he will know that here in Warsaw at 6

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Twarda Street, in the building where Jewish life had once flourished, an independent, autonomous, and legal Jewish body exists whose name is "Commmittee of Religious Congregations in Poland," and that this body was brought into being to restore, organize and maintain religious-national life in Poland."

Today, from the perspective of thirty six years, I can see the enormity of our error. Nothing even approaching the number of tens of thousands of Jews I mentioned in my greetings has remained in Poland today. Some say five thousands, others - ten thousand. However, the

address at 6 Twarda Street, the Committee of Congregations, and a handful of communities illuminated by the splendor of the past, have remained.

After the destruction of the Temple, when Jews scattered throughout the world and arrived in Europe, after the Jewish wanderers finally settled someplace and established a community, leaders of the new congregation would make the following entry in the community register to serve as a motto for future generations: "Four houses shamur." The four houses designated the synagogue, the graveyard, the prayer house, and study house. The Hebrew acronym shamur, composed of four Hebrew letters: shin, mem, vav, resh, referred to the following: shin - ritual slaughterers (shochatim); mem - teachers (melamdim); mem, vav, resh - circumcisers and rabbis (mohalim verabanim).

On the basis of "four houses shamur" Jews established a community in those days. Only a synagogue and a graveyard exist in Poland out of these four ancient elements. But we have established a Jewish address and it still exists.

In addition to the problems I described above, the Committee of Religious Congregations faced a host of other tasks. In what follows I enumerate the most important among them.

Salvaging Torah Scrolls and Holy Books

Along with Jews the Nazis annihilated nearly every trace of Jewish culture; they destroyed libraries, enormous collections of holy books, burned synagogues and study houses with their Torah scrolls. Treasures of incalculable value of holy articles wrought in silver and gold,

including ancient art objects, were pillaged and shipped to Germany. Some of them were brought to Prague and stored in the famous local synagogue which was turned into a museum. The Nazi taskmaster, who looted holy articles throughout Europe, ordered to establish a museum of Jewish artifacts in Prague in the belief that it would be the only memorial to Jews in Europe.

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The Committee of Religious Congregations launched the campaign of salvaging Torah scrolls and other holy books which survived the great conflagration. With the help of our communities we salvaged and assembled several crates of books at 6 Twarda Street. We decided to transfer the treasure to Israel and asked the Interior Ministry for an export licence.

Due to objections raised by the Education Ministry the books remained temporarily Warsaw. In the meantime an emissary arrived in Poland from the Land of Israel especially for that purpose: Mr. Schneorsohn of the Hebrew University. His task was twofold: to establish a local branch of the Society of Friends of the Hebrew University, and to collect books which were to be transferred, to the extent possible, to the library of the Hebrew Univerisity in Jerusalem. Needless to say, we took most favorable view of these undertakings: let the orphaned books go to the Land of Israel, instead of laying about here in Poland.

After prolonged negotiations and intensive lobbying I succeeded in obtaining the required export licence from the Interior Minister Wladyslaw Walski.

The books were cleaned and sorted. A group of scribes handled the Torah scrolls, choosing books and parchments without blemish, correcting others, and then packing the whole lot. In late 1948 we shipped over one hundred crates to the Ministry of Religious Affairs in Israel.

The entire operation of salvaging books and holy articles was supervised by the Director General of the Committee of Religious Congregations, Yehuda Leib Bialer. Mr. Bialer returned to Poland as a repatriate from the Soviet Union in July 1946 and remined in Poland until January 1949. Upon his arrival in Poland we coopted him as a Mizrahi representative to the Executive of our Committee, appointing him Director General. Mr. Itzhak Leufer was coopted together with him on behalf of Agudath Israel.

Yehuda Leib Bialer entered an organization which was well-built, and properly managed, but lacking a guiding hand. Before long he introduced order in all the departments and orderly administration.

Who was Yehuda Leib Bialer? What kind of man became the pillar of the Committee of Religious Congregations in Warsaw? I feel a need to devote a few words to the figure of this man devoted to holy work in those crazy days.

His ancestors had been leaders and wardens of the Warsaw community, and Amszynow hassidim. His father, rabbi Hanoch Henich Bialer, bequathed to him good manners and proper conduct in relation to God and to his fellows. In his youth he studied in a yeshiva in Warsaw where he was called up for the reading of the Law. After marriage he took up commerce and during this period he acquired a great deal of general

knowledge, particularly in Judaic studies and in aesthetics. In addition, he became one of the major figures in the Mizrahi movement in Poland. In the Holocaust he lost part of his extensive family and wandered into the Russian interior with the remnant of his close family. Ultimately he went as far as the Ural Mountains. When the war was over, he returned to Poland and devoted all his time to rebuilding

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the destroyed communities. Before long he became a prime mover of the Committee of Religious Congregations: he consolidated the proper managerial and organizational framework for the communities in all spheres of their operations, began managing the funds which arrived to the communities from the JOINT, handled the salvaging of books and holy articles, and, together with Captain Drucker, presided over ransoming of children.

The man was a truly astonishing personage, a marvelous blend of seemingly contradictory qualities. On the one hand, a delicate, poetic, and gentle soul, possessed of sublime feelings. On the other hand, breathtaking organizational talents, realistic approach, great orderliness and mathematical precision. A prominent scholar, well versed in Judaic studies, who nonetheless applied himself with great dilligence to aesthetics, particularly in its applications to the Jewish art; in fact he was one of the major aestheticians of his time. Interestingly enough, at that time I was ignorant of Bialer the dreamer, the poet. All I saw was Bialer the businessman, the realist, the man of detail, in short, a man who brought order to the Committee of Religious Congregations. The dreaming, poetic, inspired, noble-

minded Bialer I had an opportunity to get to know and understand only in the winter of 1948, during our visit to Auschwitz.

A large group of rabbis, community leaders and workers, and other public figures attended the ceremony of inauguration of the Museum established by the Polish government as a memorial to the victims of the camp. I remember we tarried at the building called "Canada" which had served as a warehouse for sorting belongings and clothing plundered from Jews prior to their extermination: heaps of clothing, hair, eye-glasses, shoes, children's and infants' shoes, prayer shawls, ornamental fringes, torn parchments of Torah scrolls, shreds of phylacteries, books. Former barracks turned into special pavillions were designated as memorials commemorating victims of all nations; a sign bearing block letters indicating the name of the particular nation was put up above the entrance to each pavillion. We kept looking intently for a pavillion commemorating the destruction of the Jewish people but no such memorial existed. This meant nothing less that victims of all European peoples perished here except the Jews. Stunned, grieving and silent we gathered at the entrance of one nameless pavillion with a sign saying only: Extermination of millions (Zaglada milionow). There we sat down and there we wept. We recited psalms and returned in a state of shock to the village of Oswiecim (Auschwitz). A more stinging insult could hardly be imagined.

On the morrow of our visit Bialer read to me an expressive poem recapitulating his impressions of the tour of the camp:

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"Canada quarantined/The loot's rearguard/For the raid of the

fallen/desecrated/The dying Europe/abyss gaping open/Russians, Czechs, Greeks,/Sons of France, Poles/Pavillions, pavillions/And my brethren of erased name/Where are they?/The martyrs/The pure/Were they erased?/Forgotten/In the legacy of signposts?"

The poem was printed in a book of poems Ashedoth Yamim (Slopes of days), published by the Rav Kook Institute in Jerusalem, 1957, p. 35.

Some time later we stood in front of the memorial commemorating the martyrs of the Holocaust, a beautiful piece of work executed by the well-known artist Rappaport. We planned to conduct mass memorial service together with the Central Committee of Jews in Poland on the day of inauguration, and for this purpose we brought the Holy Arc there. Bialer the man of the spirit, the artist possessed of highly refined aesthetic sensibility, prepared the courtain for the Arc.

Previously we had salvaged shreds of prayer shawls and ornamental fringes from Auschwitz and other death camps, and brought them to the synagogue at 6 Twarda Street. This is where Bialer designed and created the curtain. It turned out to be a marvellous piece of work: the curtain and the capporeth (the covering the lid of the Holy Arc) consisted straight and twisting lines of shreds of prayer shawls and ornamental fringes, the silent witnesses of the death of the Jews who perished for the Sanctification of the Name. Delegations from the free world came to visit us on the day of inauguration. I remember, one day I entered with one of the delegations to the large room where Bialer was busy at work with another Jew, a craftsman, preparing the curtain. I saw him leaning over the work table, giving instructions to his workmate, repeatedly caressing the shreds of the prayer shawls, like a

devoted father caressing the head of his child. I said to myself: at this moment he must surely hear the cries of the praying Jews, the last cries of the owners of these prayer shawls.

This was Bialer. This marvellous, truly sublime person etched himself indelibly on my memory. Bialer, the man, may his soul be bound in the bond of life.

Bialer's colleague who worked closely with him in the Committee of Religious Congregations was Itzhak Laufer, a gifted man, a scholar, who worked in full harmony with him. Both inscribed glorious pages in the annals of the Committee of Religious Congregations in Poland.

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Graveyards in Poland

The second major problem which faced both the officials of the Committee of Religious Congregations and the communities themselves, was the painful issue of neglected graveyards throughout the country.

Each of the 86 communities in Poland ensured the orderly functioning of its own graveyard. But how fared thousands of abandoned and neglected graveyards scattered throughout Poland?

In thousands of towns and villages, now "Judenrein," former Polish neighbors of their Jewish residents began taking over the graveyards; they toppled tombstones to pave with them their courtyards, tore down fences, and let their flocks graze among the graves. In some towns and villages the local authorities decided to demolish whole sections of graveyards, open up the graves and remove the remains of the dead to make space for a new road, to build a factory, or a public park.

Although hardly a meeting of the Committee of Religious

Congregations passed without the matter of neglected graveyards being included in the agenda, if truth be told, we simply were unable to cope with this task. It would have amounted to a Herculean undertaking requiring a special staff of devoted workers backed by funds of millions. Despite the strong bonds of sentiment binding Polish Jews throughout the world to the neglected graves in the country of their ancestors, until now no Jewish body, public or rabbinical, has been formed to attend to this issue with all due seriousness. In fact, it is quite astonishing that no attempts have been made to solve the problem, which, incidentally, raises numerous halachic questions. It is forbidden to exhume graves without rabbinical supervision, and Halacha teaches us to revere the deceased. "Profanation of the dead" is a serious crime, but tens of thousands of graves are being demolished and the bones of our ancestors are trampled by feet of cattle.

Some time ago a group of communal leaders from among Polish Jews, citizens of the United States, responded to the need to do something about the graves. They went to Poland, visited several graveyards, and saw the neglect and destruction with their own eyes. Thereupon they appealed to the Polish government to enact laws aimed at preventing the further destruction of Jewish graveyards.

Polish officials extended warm welcome to them, did not spare promises, but nothing has been done to this day. Members of the Jewish delegation took pictures of themselves, and upon their return to America called a press conference. This was the end of the whole affair.

In 1948 I submitted a memorandum to the director of JOINT in

Poland, Mr. William Bain, containing a proposal to solve the painful question of desecration of Jewish graves in Poland. It was quite clear that the situation would deteriorate further in the future; Polish officials and municipal authorities were unable to prevent destruction of thousands of graveyards. If truth be told, they had not shown any serious intention to deal with the matter. On the contrary, there were indications that Poland was interested in erasing the historic traces of Jewish presence in the country. In view of all this, it was obvious that if we did not assume the responsibility for maintenance of the graveyards, nobody was going to do it for us.

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In my memorandum I proposed that the whole country be divided into 12 regions, and one town selected in each region as funeral center. Graves in all the graveyards in each region would be exhumed and the remains brought to the regional center for burial in a mass grave. After that one or two guards would be posted at the main graveyard for perpetuity. Needless to say, the entire plan hinged on the approval of Torah scholars. Halacha tends to give very strict interpretation of the prohibition of exhumation ("removal of bones"). The code of Jewish Law, Shulkhan Arukh Yoreh Deah, contains a special chapter dealing with "prohibition of removing the dead and the bones from their place." However, it also says explicitly that if justifiable fears exist that the grave might be profaned, or flood waters are likely to penetrate the grave, the bones must be exhumed so as to forestall desecration.

The Committee of Religious Congregations Merges with the Central Committee of Jews in Poland

The problem of participation of religious Jewry in the Central Committee of Jews in Poland was as old as the Committee itself. As early as November 1944, the Central Committee was functioning in recently liberated Lublin, assuming the serious responsibility of supplying the surviving remnant not just with food, but providing spiritual nourishment as well. Already in the formative period of the Committee, circles of observant Jews proposed that religious needs of Polish Jewry be attended to in the framework of activities of local committees. Unfortunately, heads of the Central Committee belittled the significance of religion and tradition in the life of Jews in Poland and resisted attempts of the religous section of the surviving remnant to make its influence felt in the shaping of the new Jewish community in the country. More than that: they did everything possible to curtail this influence. Even after repatriation from the Soviet Russia in the framework of which thousands of observant Jews returned to Poland, heads of the Central Committee refused to "bring back the dead by electric shocks"--the dead, of course, meaning religious Jewry.

Due to the composition of the Committee, consisting mostly of individuals long estranged from religious way of life, it was unable to attend to the spiritual needs of tens of thousands of observant Jews for whom Jewish tradition and customs provided the only content and comfort of their lives.

No one familiar with the period of November-December 1944 in Lublin, would ever be able to forget the humiliating attitude of heads

of the Central Committee of Jews in Poland toward the aspirations of a handful of observant Jews living in town at that time. Their request to be assigned a room in the spacious offices of the Central Committee to house the Department of Religious Affairs operating in affiliation with the Executive, was turned down. In view of this behavior, it should come as no surprise that the observant Jews saw no other choice than getting organized on an independent basis within the framework of a separate organization. In this way they revived the age-old Jewish institution, the Kehillah, with all its familiar and diversified responsibilities and jurisdiction.

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In the meantime the vigorous activity of the Committee of Religious Congregations bore fruit in the shape of an extensive network of kehillot and religious, ritual and educational institutions. Rabbinates were formed, as well as heders and talmud torahs, synagogues were rebuilt, graveyards were fenced and tended. The respect for and the authority of the Committee of Religious Congregations grew. Jews abroad began noticing us, whereas some Polish Jews began regarding us as the true representative body of Polish Jews.

All this was certainly not to the Central Committee's liking. In their appearances abroad, its heads often heard the following claim: "You do not represent Polish Jewry. The Committee of Kehillot represents it, for it is the true legator of the old kehillot." As a result, the Central Committee of Jews in Poland began pressing for unification and creating a single body which would represent the entire Polish Jewry both in Poland and abroad. The pressure originated from

the Religious Affairs Department of the Interior Ministry and the Jewish Affairs Department of the Foreign Ministry headed by a Jew Siniawski, former pupil of orphanage in Lvov. However, the real pressure, which we could hardly afford to ignore, came from Szymon Zachariasz, head of the Jewish Section of the Polish Communist Party. Zachariasz pulled the strings in all social and political moves of the Central Committee of Jews in Poland; his directives carried the force of the true ruling body in the country. Nothing of significance happened in local committees throughout the country without his knowledge and approval. In a conversation with me he revealed that in his youth he had studied under a great rabbinical authority, Rabbi Menachem Zemba; however, at present, he declared, he was very, very removed from that world...

In point of fact, we were neither willing nor prepared to join the Central Committee, or to cooperate with it. In all my conversations with senior Polish state officials I always heard their view and opinion that Jewish committees active in Poland had no legal basis whatsoever. They were being tolerated for the time being only because of the wretched situation of the surviving remnant in the country, but in due course they were going to be disbanded. This view was expressed by Polish Interior Minister Wladyslaw Walski in June 1947, shortly after the promulgation of a comprehensive memorandum on the new legal status of religious communities in Poland. "The only Jewish institution to be tolerated in the future in Poland will be religious community, in accordance with the promise contained in the country's constitution." Already then Polish communists looked askance at their Jewish comrades

who occupied top positions in the governmental apparatus. For these reasons we believed that we stood better chances as an independent legally constituted organization without being coopted by the Central Committee of Jews in Poland whose future was hanging in the balance and which kept displaying negative, even hostile attitude to Jewish religion.

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The question was discussed on several ocassions during 1947. In all meetings held by our Executive together with the Rabbis' Council the prevailing view was that no ties should be established with the Central Committee. In the first half of 1947 we refrained from giving a clear answer to the Central Committee's proposal. For their part, however, heads of the Central Committee refused to let the matter rest. To appear to the world as the sole legitimate representative of Polish Jewry was of utmost importance to them.

The whole issue was leaked to Jewish press in Poland which attacked and denounced us as "fomenting schizm" and working against the unity of all Polish Jews. Our answer to these charges was: "And where have you been in Lublin in November 1944, when we begged and pleaded with you to establish a department for us?"

In late 1947, however, Szymon Zachariasz intervened angrily in the affair; we could not ignore his views. This is how it was:

Our executive body, the Executive of the Committee of Religious Congregations, consisted of three groups: 1) three Mizrahi representatives; 2) three Agudath Israel representatives; 3) two representatives of General Zionists and this author as chairman. At that time we had

not yet reached the stage of general democratic elections. The situation in the country remained unclear and mass exodus of Jews continued. The representatives of Mizrahi and Agudath Israel were the pillars of the Executive, as well as our leading activists. Mizrahi and Agudah operated as political parties but without official recognition and therefore illegally; at that time all Zionist parties operated legally with no one interfering in their activities. In contrast, Mizrahi and Agudah operated clandestinely. They did experience some official harassment, but the steps taken against them were not very severe. Two Zionist movements, Ahduth Ha'avodah and Hashomer Hatzair cast aspersions on them before the authorities, describing them as parties of black reaction. It is quite possible that they were suspected of disloyalty to the new government. The Central Committee of Jews in Poland, which had always regarded us as reactionary circles, also joined in the campaign of villification. In my contacts with government officials I always defended the two religious parties, pointing at their total loyalty toward the authorities, in contrast to their attitude toward the prewar anti-Semitic regime. Now I can say that due to my ceaseless lobbying no severe measures were taken against the two parties, which enabled them to carry on with regular activities until 1949, when all Zionist parties were dissolved.

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Despite the regard for my opinion in the governmental circles in Poland, my meeting with Szymon Zachariasz in September 1947 did not go well. The subject of our meeting was the merger of the Committee of Religious Congregations with the Central Committee of Jews in Poland.

He endeavored to convince me that the religious circles would benefit by the merger, and even the two illegal religious movements would benefit as well. Asked in what would religious circles benefit by joining the Central Committee, Zachariasz did not answer; he only looked at me with astonishment. I understood that the benefit would be that they would not be persecuted.

On June 1, 1947, at the sixth general conference of the Committee of Religious Congregations, attended also by members of the Rabbis' Council, the following decisions were adopted:

The Committee adopts the principle of unity. This position emerged in the course of meetings between the Rabbinate and representatives of the Committee of Religious Congregations. Existence of two separate bodies representing the small Jewish community in Poland is not advantageous. One single representative body should represent the community both before the outside world and internally. The Committee of Religious Congregations makes its joining the Central Committee of Jews in Poland conditional on its acceding to the following demands:

1. The holy Sabbath will be designated as the official day of rest for all the institutions of the Central Committee. The Sabbath has been consecrated in Jewish history and tradition, and constitutes the fundamental principle of Judaism. It is to be stressed that not only the Central Committee refrain from meeting on Saturday, but the holy day will be respected as the day of rest for all the branches and institutions of the Central Committee.
2. Kitchens belonging to the Central Committee will make kosher food, when at least one person demands it.

3. The right of the Committee of Religious Congregations to continue developing a network of religious schools (talmud torah) in Poland will be guaranteed.
4. It is necessary that the younger generation of Jews in Poland will be given the opportunity to study Bible verses with the Rashi commentaries, chapters of Mishna and even a page of Gemarah. The Committee of Religious Congregations cannot yield on this matter since it constitutes one of the principles of Judaism: studying Torah equals all other obligations.
4. The Committee will have the right to continue the operation of the religious-national childrens home in Zabrze to bring up the orphans in the spirit of traditional Judaism.
5. The Committee of Religious Congregations demands a total financial autonomy so that it would be able to conduct its activities as it sees fit, according to its principles and possibilities.

If these five demands are met, we see no further obstacles on the way of merger between the Committee of Religious Congregations and the Central Committee of Jews in Poland.

From June to November 1947 several joint meetings with representatives of the Central Committee took place; before long it became clear that our demands regarding observing the Sabbath and kashruth were not going to be met. They also expressed serious reservations concerning the religious childrens home. Generally speaking, they were interested in one thing only: a joint decision that the two parties agree to a political-social merger.

On November 15, 1947 the Committee of Religious Congregations met for yet another session with the Rabbis' Council. It proved to be a decisive meeting. Apart from members of the Executive, the following rabbis attended: the Rabbi of Cracow, Moshe Steinberg; the Rabbi of Sosnowiec, Isaschar Engelrad; the Rabbi of Lodz, Aharon Krawitz; the Rabbi of Wroclaw, Shalom Treistman; the Rabbi of Bytom, Itzhak Ayzik Liebes; the Rabbi of Katowice, Gabl; the Rabbi of Podgorze and the future Rabbi of Cracow, Shimon Fraenkel, and several others whose names I no longer remember. After prolonged discussions the assembly resolved that the Holy Sabbath would not be negotiable, and that the projected merger was to be confined to social-political sphere. Although even the latter was questionable, we had no other alternative. At any rate, from our point of view the unification was to be effected only for the purpose of relations with the outside world. Our internal autonomy was to be retained.

On March 3, 1948, a joint meeting convened at the headquarters of the Central Committee. The Central Committee was represented by the following: chairman of the Central Committee, Dr. A. Berman; M. Biter, Laziebnik, Shner - members of the board. On behalf of the Committee of Religious Congregations present were: rabbi D. Kahane - chairman; rabbi Shalom Treistman, Naftali Shuchfeld, and I. L. Bialer - members of the Executive. General Secretary of the Central Committee, Laziebnik, reviewed previous meetings and announced that the Central Committee could not accept the demands of observing the Sabbath and kashrut. They also demanded that the childrens home in Zabrze be placed under the Central Committee's management. As for our other demands, he stated

that after the Committee of Religious Congregations joined the Central Committee of Jews in Poland, compromise could be reached in joint meetings of the two bodies. A lively discussion followed attended by all participants. After we declared that no compromise was possible on Sabbath and kashrut, the two parties resolved that the present meeting marked the merger of the two bodies and henceforth one united body was to be the sole representative of the Jewish community in Poland. The Committee of Religious Congregations would retain its previous autonomy and that non-resolved issues would be discussed in the future.

I cannot say we were delighted to join the Central Committee. We gave them the mandate to appear as the only representatives of the Jewish community, but we got nothing in return; we all knew that sooner or later the Central Committee would absorb the religious congregations. Who could have imagined that after one year the Polish government would dissolve the Central Committee, turn it into a cultural association, whereas kehillot would retain their legal status?

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Reclaiming (rewindykacja) of Destroyed Synagogues

The ruins of burned and desecrated synagogues presented a dreadful sight for a Jewish survivor in Poland after the war. Some synagogues were burned to the ground, exteriors of others remained intact, but their interiors were despoiled completely; these gutted structures, without doors or windows served as garbage dumps for the neighbors. The only synagogues to remain intact were those used by the Nazis or municipal authorities as warehouses, hospitals, garages and workshops. The Nazis turned many synagogues into stables.

Even now we are not in a position to assess the extent of the loss of cultural treasures, especially the original Jewish art objects which perished in the conflagration. We lost buildings designed by master architects, synagogues built as citadels, in romanesque, gothic, baroque, and late Reneissance styles. We lost religious objects of inestimable artistic value: curtains of the Arc of the Law, coverings of the scrolls of the law embroidered with pure gold, hanukkah lamps, incense phials, lamps, goblets used for ceremonial blessings and benedictions over wine on Sabbath and other holy days, ornamental crowns for the scrolls of the Law, platters, pointers for reading the law, charity boxes, scroll sheaths wrought in silver and gold, and other smaller objects such as wall ornaments, etc. To this must be added numerous scrolls of the law inscribed on old parchments, some of them hundreds of years old, of great historical value.

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Among the destroyed synagogues particularly noteworthy were those built of timber. In general, wooden synagogues were one of a kind anywhere. No other Jewish community in Europe built so many synagogues with wood. In fact, this type of construction is a typically Polish-Jewish phenomenon. They began appearing in Poland in the 16th and 17th centuries, possibly even earlier. At that time the Jewish communities lacked funds, but the country was rich in timber, and there was no shortage of carpenters and chiselers. Wooden buildings were much cheaper than those made of stone. The original designs and ingenous joinery were a marvel to behold. Knowing full well the artistic - historical value of these constructions the Nazis consigned them to

flames early on, in the first days of the occupation.

The thought that the memory of these synagogues would vanish and that no one would know what historical landmarks were obliterated together with the Jews, did not let me rest. At the same time, I knew that Polish art historians had studied, among other things, Jewish art, architecture of synagogues, and in particular, the wooden synagogues. The major figure in this field was Szymon Zajczyk, murdered by the Nazis in 1942. Bearing that in mind, I went to the Architecture Department of the Warsaw Polytechnic. I was told that in 1946 a campagin had been launched to collect documents, photographs and oral testimonies on everything pertaining to Jewish art, with special emphasis on synagogues. Two important Polish institutions were studying the subject.

In the summer of 1949, prior to my departure from Poland, I received from them a most interesting map containing geographical and topographical details of all towns and villages in Poland, sites of wooden synagogues, now no longer in existence. Thus the locations of these synagogues and their photographs were preserved, and their memory would not be obliterated.

The reclaiming (rewindykacja in Polish) of synagogues meant handing the intact synagogues over to the new community. In fact, the first task of each community leader was to claim the synagogue from the authorities, repairing it and placing it at the disposal of his congregation. This was in accordance with paragraph 8 of the circular letter of Fabruary 10, 1945, concerning reorganization of Jewish religious life in the country: Starosta (sub-district governor) is

required to turn all synagogue buildings in the area under his jurisdiction over to the new kehilla. Reality, however, was somewhat different. Considerable proportion of the surviving synagogues remained in strangers' hands. The community boards lodged protests, appealed to the courts, and often engaged in protracted legal battles. Some communities won their suits and reclaimed their synagogues, but a great many houses of worship remained in the hands of Polish neighbors. There were simply no Jews around to claim them...

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Here I would like to mention several, particularly interesting examples of legal suits over synagogues. They should give the reader a general idea of other legal battles the accounts of which can be found in the archives of the Committee of Religious Congregations located at 6 Twarda Street.

The first involved the synagogue in Cracow, known as the Rabbi Ayzik son of rabbi Yeklesh Synagogue, Boznica Ajzyka in Polish. Rabbi Ayzik was a rich community leader in the 17th century Cracow. He supplied the funds for the construction of a synagogue in the Jewish ghetto in those days called Kazimierz. Barred from living in Cracow proper, the local Jews established their community in the city's suburb, Kazimierz. Thanks to his good connections with the royal court, Rabbi Ayzik was granted permission, or royal charter (przywilej) from the King Wladyslaw IV himself, to build a synagogue in Kazimierz. The charter was granted on April 30, 1638. The synagogue was built in the Renaissance style, one of the most beautiful buildings of its kind in the country.

The work was by no means smooth. The local priest, or proboszcz, Marcin Kladzinski, opposed the venture and actually succeeded in halting the construction work. Rabbi Ayzik, a determined man and a veteran communal leader in Cracow, did not give up. He appealed to the Bishop of Cracow, Jakob Zadzik. The ensuing negotiations lasted four years. In the years 1640-1644 Rabbi Ayzik completed the construction of the synagogue to the pride of all Jews of Cracow.

Shortly after the outbreak of World War II the municipal authorities seized the synagogue building, turning it into storage for stage sets of the city theater. This act saved the building from destruction. Other synagogues in town, such as the old synagogue in Kazimierz, built in the Romanesque style, was burned to the ground.

After the war the synagogue continued to serve as storage space for stage sets and other theater props. For the time being the Cracow community did not claim the building. The handful of survivors worshipped in three other surviving synagogues: the famous Rabbi Moshe Isserlish Synagogue, the Kofa, and a former "temple."

Then somethinbg terrible happened. In July 1947, the Cracow municipal theater decided to vacate the synagogue building. They removed their props, cleaned the building and left it empty without notifying the community about their action. Several days later, on July 27, 1947, the day of "Saint Jacob" (Jesus' brother) in the Christian calendar, a number of priests of the "National Polish Church," the rival of the Polish Roman Catholic Church appeared on the scene. They came at the head of a crowd of worshippers, put up the picture of the Holy Mother on the doors of the Arc of the Law, placed a large cross

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on it and decorated the wall with pictures of saints and other Christian symbols. Thereupon they conducted a mass, and upon departure put another cross on the entrance doors, declaring that the synagogue building had served once as Church of Saint Jacob; the Jews, they alleged, had turned the church into a synagogue. Now the time had come to reclaim the "church."

Mr. Sternberg, community leader in Cracow, telephoned me on the same day and in agitated voice related to me the story recounted above. I arrived in town the next day and immediately contacted the headquarters of the Polish National Church.

"Is it possible?" I began, "Isn't it enough for you all that the Nazis did to us by burning and laying waste all synagogues together with the Jews, while large part of the Polish population stood by, indifferent to our fate? And now, after the bloody war, without asking anyone, without consent of the Jewish community in Cracow, on your own, just like in Nazi days, you come and turn an ancient synagogue, a historical landmark built in the 17th century into a Christian church?"

The bishop of the Polish National Church replied with an old song: "We, the Polish-National Progressive Church, did not keep aloof and helped the Jews as best as we could. However, we are in a possession of historical evidence according to which the Jews were the ones who turned the Saint Jacob church into synagogue.

In the course of a tense conversation which lasted half an hour I understood that the Polish side was not going to back out. From various hints dropped by the Bishop I also gathered that seizure of the

sunagogue had been planned in advance. Apart from members of the Polish National Church, people from the Municipal Cracow Theater also took part by vacating the building without notifying anyone. It also seemed quite certain that the board of the city hall had known about the plan and tacitly endorsed it.

Upon my return to Warsaw I immediately called a meeting of the Executive of the Committee of Religious Congregations. We drafted a strongly worded memorandum for the Interior Minister Wladyslaw Walski. Having acquainted himself with our memorandum Walski appointed a commission to deal with the problem; the commission was headed by director of the Department of Religious Affairs, Jaroslaw Demianczuk. The commission heard testimonies and gathered relevant historical material. Its work was not completed until late summer 1948. The Polish-National Church based its claim on a pseudo-scientific study supplied to the commission by a Polish historian Dr. Juliusz Stanislaw Harbut. Dr. Harbut came to a conclusion that in the years 1772-1777 the present site of the synagogue was occupied by a church. After the partition of Poland, when Cracow found itself under Austrian rule, the Emperor Joseph II seized the church building for the military, and later sold it to Ayzik Yeklesz. The latter first turned the church building into a warehouse and later converted it into synagogue. Dr. Harbut's study drew upon various historical sources and constituted a masterpiece of sophistry.

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We asked Meir Busak, historian, writer and poet, to read Dr. Harbut's "product" and give his evaluation. Busak, a faithful disciple

of the famous Jewish historian, Prof. Meir Balaban, approached the matter with all due seriousness and objectivity, from purely historical point of view. He based his review primarily on works of well-known, reliable and objective Polish historians. Among them was Jan Dlugosz who lived and wrote in the fifteenth century Cracow. In a book written in Latin Dlugosz refers to the Church of Saint Jakob, but places it in the Christian section of Kazimierz, and not in the Jewish quarter. The church stood near the gates leading to the township of Skawina. Seventeenth century maps of Cracow also place the Ayzik synagogue on one side of Kazimierz and the church on the other, Christian side.

Concerning the ludicrous thesis advanced by Harbut, according to which the Austrian Emperor, Joseph II, had sold the church building to the Jews who proceeded to turn it into a synagogue, Busak made the following comment: The Austrians ruled Cracow in the years 1772-1777 and therefore the Austrian Emperor could go ahead with the alleged sale to the Jews only during that period. However, the documents demonstrate beyond shadow of a doubt that as late as 1785 the church was still in existence and located in the Christian section of Kazimierz, at a distance of about one kilometer from the Ayzik synagogue. Furthermore, in 1785, Joseph II had been dead. In addition, the charter granted to the Jewish community by King Wladyslaw IV states explicitly that the synagogue was to be built from the foundations and says nothing about changing the nature of an existing building. The implication of Harbut's thesis, namely that a Polish king would agree to converting a church into a synagogue did not even merit serious consideration.

From my conversations with Polish officials, members of the

commission, I gathered that they would willingly accept the thesis of Dr. Harbut, despite the fact that they did not regard it as truthful, only because this would give them an opportunity to strike at the Catholic Church which at that time was fighting openly against the communist regime in Poland. They were more than willing to give their backing to the Polish National Church, a sworn enemy of the Catholic Church. However, we did not let down our guard; Meir Busak's deductions and conclusions were so unequivocal and unsparing that finally Minister Walski intervened on our behalf and ordered to return the synagogue to the Cracow kehilla.

Pictures of saints and the crosses were removed, the synagogue was reclaimed, but where would Jews come from to pray, to pour forth their bitterness before our Father in Heaven?

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The second case of seizure of a synagogue occured also in Cracow in 1941; it involved the synagogue at Szpitalna Street.

The synagogue at Szpitalna Street had been built relatively recently, before World War I. It acquired a reputation for its modern and dignified services. In the last years before World War II it became famous for its cantor, the well-known Baruch Sperber, who was also a known composer. At the end of 1941, when Cracow Jews were making preparations for moving to the closed ghetto, the synagogue was surrounded by Gestapo men; all tenants, including the cantor were taken away and disappeared without a trace. The synagogue keys were handed over to an Orthodox Ukrainian priest who arrived together with the Gestapo and who in all probability had informed them about the place.

The synagogue on Szpitalna Street was turned into an Orthodox church; at the opening ceremony several Jews were killed.

Details of this affair reached me after the successful transfer to us of the Ayzik synagogue in late summer 1948. My inquiries revealed that no Orthodox church had ever existed in the Catholic city of Cracow. However, during Nazi occupation the Germans handed over the synagogue keys to their natural ally in the city, an Orthodox priest, which explained the existence of the only Orthodox church in the city.

During my stay in Cracow I visited the former synagogue, now a church. The present priest had been officiating for only a year; the first priest who turned the synagogue into a church left Cracow together with the Germans. He probably feared being put on trial. At any rate, we lodged a complaint with the board of the church and the whole matter was referred to the district court of Cracow. In 1949, I left Poland. It seems to me that the church is still around in Cracow: "You have murdered and also taken possession."

It is a known fact that names of numerous towns and villages in Eastern Europe entered the annals of history thanks to illustrious rabbis who lived and worked in these otherwise obscure places. This was also the case of Kutno whose name spread far and wide thanks to the great rabbinical figure of Yehoshua Trunk, known as rabbi Shiale Kutner. During the war all Kutno's synagogues and study houses were destroyed with the exception of the spacious building of rabbi Shiale Kutner's study house. However, with the declaration of Kutno as "Judenrein," the municipality took possession of the building, turning part of it into its headquarters and the rest into a fire brigade

depot. The handful of Jewish survivors from Kutno demanded that the Committee of Religious Congregations intervene with the municipality in order to return to them rabbi Kutner's study house.

Meanwhile an abominable act was perpetrated. The surviving remnant of Kutno Jewish community put up a large monument to the Kutno martyrs and partisans in the ravaged graveyard. The ceremony of unveiling the monument was attended by many Jews from central Poland; I too attended in my capacity as chairman of the Committee of Religious Congregations. Government and party officials as well as many Polish town residents were also in attendance. Every speaker strongly denounced the savagery of the Nazi occupier toward the Jews.

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Sevaral days afterward the monument was smashed to pieces. The Kutno Jews did not give up and put up an even larger monument. But it did not escape the fate of its predecessor; broken fragments was all that remained of it. To recall, these heinous deeds were committed in the aftermath of sharp denounciations delivered by Poles. At that point the surviving Kutno Jews realized what was expected of them. They got up and left the town altogether. Not even one Jew remained. Under these circumstances, to whom could the Kutner's study house be returned?

The account of the bitter end of the famous Yeshiva of the Lublin Sages, fills me with grief and pain. The famous Rabbi of Lublin, the late Meir Shapira founded and organized this yeshiva and served as its guardian angel. It attracted students from all over the world. Before long it became a center of rabbinical education, inviting comparison with the golden age of the fluorishing religious studies in the 16th

and 17th centuries.

Upon my arrival to Lublin in November 1944, I discovered that the yeshiva had been turned into military hospital; upon their occupation of Lublin, the Nazis were the first to put it to this use and the Polish Army of liberation also used it as a military hospital. In late 1946 I came to Lublin for the second time only to find that the building of the yeshiva now housed the premises of the Catholic University. At the entrance to a great hall, now serving as the university auditorium, a large cross was put up. Students and their professors walked in the hallways, the building throbbed with life, but the students and heads of the Yeshiva of Lublin Sages were nowhere to be seen. Their bones lay scattered in Belzec, Treblinka, Auschwitz and Majdanek.

I requested a meeting with the university rector. I was received by a very old man, who greeted me politely and without asking for the reasons of my visit proceeded to express his deep sorrow at the fact that he, rector of the Catholic university, had to receive me, a rabbi representing Jewish faith, in the building of a former yeshiva. A bitter dialogue ensued. I did not pity him and expressed all I felt at that moment in this building only recently throbbing with Jewish life and study. I told him of the view taken by the Jews of the behavior of large sections of the Polish population during Nazi occupation, of the Vatican's silence, of the attitude of the official Catholic Church circles in contemporary Poland. I asked, why could Catholic and Protestant clergymen in Western Europe issue pastoral letters to their flocks, warning against collaboration and demanding help to Jews in

their plight. I asked why did the Polish episcopate kept silent, and why did the Ukrainian Metropolitan Sheptytsky see it necessary to issue a pastoral letter to his congregation, entitled "Thou shalt not murder"?

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In the middle of our vociferous argument I asked, "How would you react to a demand to restore to the Jews the building of the famous Yeshiva of Lublin Sages?" It is quite possible that the Rector had prepared for this question for he answered without delay: "If you had sufficient number of rabbinical students we would have certainly given our most serious attention to this matter. But I do not know what view would the Education Ministry take of it." At the conclusion of our meeting he said the following: "As a religious man who believes in the Maker of the World, don't you think it would be better if this building had passed into the hands of atheistic communists, or rather should it house the premises of an educational institution which gives instruction to the Christians, but nonetheless believers in God?"

Embittered I left the building. In my mind's eye I saw another building, the famous rabbinical academy in Breslau, now Wroclaw, which currently houses the Communist Youth center and belongs to the Polish Workers Party.

At that time between 15 and 20 Jewish families lived in Lublin, but in Wroclaw lived many Jews, mostly repatriates from the Soviet Union.

Hundreds, perhaps thousands of ruined and undamaged synagogues, study houses and yeshivot remain on the Polish land. Who cares about them? Who is interested in them?

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Aryan Papers, Christian Birth Certificates: Are Jewish Apostates Marranos?

One of the most painful and abnormal effects of the Nazi occupation were so-called "Aryan papers," used both during the Holocaust and after the end of the war. During the occupation Jewish men and women who stared death in the face, would adopt a disguise; they lived as Christians among their Gentile neighbors, attended church services regularly and behaved in accordance with Christian precepts and customs. It was a very dangerous game to play, forcing its participants to adopt all manner of disguise and never let down their guard. Woe to a Jew whose pronounciation, or Semitic features betrayed his or her origins; informers to the Gestapo were everywhere.

Two categories of "Aryan Jews" lived among Christians then. The first comprised Jews who out of despair went to a priest asking to be converted. By and large these priests welcomed Jewish prospective converts, for in so doing they observed the commandment of their faith to gain adherents for Christianity. Although no reliable figures exist on the extent of this phenomenon, thousands of Jews are known to have resorted to this step; having succumbed to despair they brought their children to the priest, seeking in this way to save them from death. Both the priests and the converting Jews knew full well that Nazis did not make any distinction between a Jew and a converted Jew. Both were doomed. However, with the help of Christian birth certificates which the priest prepared for the Jewish convert it was possible to apply for German identification card (Kenkarte) ensuring freedom of movement for

its holder. I know that even before the war there were assimilated Jews who sought to make the final step by converting to Christianity; their parents already had severed every tie with Jewry, But apostasy on such a mass scale was possible only during the Holocaust. The Germans were aware of this practice and more than one priest was executed together with his Jewish convert after being caught in the act by the Germans.

Now and then German authorities would convey strict warnings to the Polish episcopate not to baptize Jews. I believe that the Catholic clery was aware of the fact that the urge to convert and the large number of applicants did not exactly stem from a sudden awakening of longing for Christianity among the Jews. But this question ought to be left for the Christian Church to ponder.

At the same time, however, I must emphasize that there were priests who supplied numerous Jewish applicants with forged Christian birth certificates, and in doing so risked their lives. Such priests are rightly considered the Righteous among the Nations.

The second category comprises Jews who held Aryan papers without, however, converting themselves, or those who carried forged identity cards. Jews from both these categories faced the same peril, waiting and hoping for Hitler's defeat. We regarded them as "modern Marranos." In these notes I am unwilling to enter into halachic problems surrounding the concept of "marranos." Broadly speaking, according to

Halacha, apostasy, even in times of emergency, is regarded as "not to be done even under the pain of death." It is to be noted, however, that the "Aryan Jews" were not Marranos at all, in the strict sense of this

word. No one forced them to convert to Christianity, certainly not the Nazis whose only goal was the physical extermination of the Jewish people. At the same time, however, these Jews used their conversion or Christian birth certificates as a means to save their lives. Thousands of them (the exact figure remains unknown) survived the German occupation in this way.

After the liberation most of these Aryan Jews discarded their disguises, heaved a sigh of relief and returned to their Jewishness. But not all of them did so. Many continued to wear the disguise, living as Christians and refusing to register themselves as Jews with various Jewish committees. Among many reasons for this behavior was the occupation complex. They believed that the disguise offered them protection, for who knows whether the hell would not be unleashed again? Some feared to lose their jobs. It was better, they believed, to carry on as Poles without arousing undue suspicions.

We knew all this, but believed that time would heal the wounded souls and minds. After a year, perhaps two, the trauma of occupation would disappear. But, as it turned out, we were wrong. In my capacity as chairman of the Committee of Religious Associations I travelled widely in Poland, visiting nearly all our communities, speaking with countless poeple, Jews and non-Jews. In 1948, after the establishment of the State of Israel, I discovered that the situation was similar to that in 1945. Many Jews refused to part with their assumed identity. We estimated their number at 15,000. These people, lacking Jewish roots, distanced themselves from all Jewish values and married Gentile women in an effort to rid themselves of their Jewish origins, their burden,

while deluding themselves that the Christians were ignorant of their true identity. But the Christians were well aware of this and even compiled secret lists of these dusguised Jews.

In my Yom Kippur sermon I touched upon this issue. In what follows I quote the full text of this sermon casting full light on the problem called "Aryan papers."

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"Great many problems, irksome questions and serious issues clamor for our attention in this holy hour, when Jews gather once a year on this particular night, submitting themselves to judgement. Let me, on this Kol Nidre night, address myself to a problem which is likely to unsettle many of you. This is a vexatious and uncomfortable issue, very painful one, whose history is two thousand years old. It became particularly acute to us, Jews who suffered from the Nazis during the war, and the first years afterwards. It could be put thus: "debate with Christianity and with the apostasy movement." A verse from our tomorrow's Haftarah [chapter from the Prophets read in the synagogue after the portion from the Pentateuch], from the Book of Jonah, may serve as a motto for our discussion: "I am a Hebrew and I worship the God of Heaven."

"It was ordained that the Jews of this generation witness one of the most terrible tragedies ever visited on our people. With our own eyes we saw the flames consuming six million Jews. Our children perished in the hell's fire, while the civilized world looked on with indifference. The deed was perpetrated by a Christian people in the Christian Europe. All the apostates were baptized with the "holy water"

and received into the fold of the holy Catholic or Protestant Church professing 'the only religion of love, mercy, forgiveness and compassion.'

"It is our deep grief that often moves us to ask for explanation of how could something like that happen. We endeavor to uncover the causes of this volcanic eruption. When we look closely we discover that the murderous Nazism did not come into being out of nothing; it had deep and extensive roots pumping into it the premieval venom which was then supplied to millions of people. Nazism with its Jew-obsession reveals itself as tinder which had been accumulating for centuries only to explode like a volcano spewing forth the hatred concealed in its entrails. What are the origins of this hatred, this hostility?

"In my opinion the responsibility for this hatred lies above all with Christianity, the "religion of love, grace and compassion." From its early days Christianity was aggressive, expansionist and intolerant. What it was prevented from achieving in peaceful ways, it accomplished with fury, sword and fire. With fire and sword it imposed its faith on whole nations and races dwelling safely in their own lands. Only a small people, without a secure roof over its head and no safe ground under its feet refused to succumb and still refuses. This people believed it carried great moral and spiritual values, and obstinately resisted the missionary zeal of Christianity. This people, surrounded by uncouth beastly world, which, despite "religion of love" was founded on war and murder and still is.

Having realized that the stiff-necked Jewish people refuses to bend its knees, Christianity resorted to different methods. With all the

means at its disposal the Church began fabricating despicable lies about Jews, disseminating them among recently Christianized heathen. The Catholic Church, now holding sway over nearly 360 million believers, planted the seeds of hatred and contempt toward the Jews, portraying them as crucifiers of Christ, as vengeful bloodthirsty people, steeped in evil ways, selfish, prepared to sell women and

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and children for handsome profit. Christianity portrays Jewry as harsh and intransigent, as embodying the traits of "jealous and vengeful God," as having become fossilized and drained of vitality. An exhausted, worn-out religion, so the argument goes, it is no longer capable of meeting the spiritual and moral aspirations of modern man. Christianity is a continuation of Judaism.

This is how people who owe such a debt to Judaism talk. But if one removes their Judaic heritage, what would be left? As late as fourth century the Christians observed the Sabbath. Only afterwards they appointed Sunday as their day of rest. They claim that love, compassion, and high moral standards are revealed only in Christianity, which to recall, originated in Judaism. As if Judaism had not discovered all these values centuries earlier, as revealed in the Torah, the prophets, the sages. Under the influence of the Christian Church world literature created a galery of ugly and horrid Jewish characters, symbols of evil, of all base impulses.

The influence of the Church on the Polish peasant is particularly pronounced in the book Chlopi (peasants) by the well-known Polish writer Wladyslaw Reymont. Among other things, it contains a noteworthy scene. Polish peasants return to their cottages after the holy Easter

Mass in the village church. The tables are laden with traditional Easter dishes. But all they do is talk with rage about the accursed Jews who killed their Messiah. They burst into tearful cries. Surely, at that moment they could have killed every Jew to avenge the Messias' death.

"The fiction of crucifixion is being taught to children in school, even in Polish schools of today. Children's souls are being poisoned; on more than one occasion, after classes Polish children threw their catechism books at the few surviving Jewish children.

"As if the fiction of responsibility for crucifixion were not enough, they concocted the blood libel, alleging the Jews with the horrid act of ritual murder. This libel is illustrated by pictures hanging in certain Polish churches until this very day. Those asking for facts should recall Kielce and Cracow. To add insult to injury a fairly tale has been manufactured about the "eternal wandering Jew" deprived of rest in this world by the curse of God. Millions of followers of the "religion of love" throughout the world sincerely believe that if the Jews suffer, undergo persecutions and torment, keep wandering ceaselessly, are consumed by fire in the ovens of Majdanek, Treblinka and Auschwitz, it is because of their sin of having crucified the Savior. The Gentiles have nothing to do with it. It is the work of God. Jews suffer for their blindness, for their sins, and their agony was visited upon them justly. Is there any point in reminding you that which you heard so often during the occupation, reminding the salt that the devout Catholics rubbed in our wounds when the ghettoes were being consumed by fires of hell? At the time the Nazi beast charged upon the

Jewish people with poisoned bayonettes and exterminated millions of them? No word was heard then from the representatives of the religion of love and the pope at its head. They looked upon the horror with equanimity, they and the liberal democracies in the West. True, often

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an individual Catholic priest, a protestant pastor, or even a senior clergyman showed human attitude to the persecuted Jews, which for the most part expressed itself in sheltering Jewish children. Some of them acted out of compassion, but most planned to convert these children later and sever their ties with Jewry and Judaism. They exploited and still do exploit our tragedy. How many Jewish children whose parents perished in the conflagration, were uprooted from our midst by apostasy? The rupture was sometimes so complete that today these children hate us and hold us in contempt. No matter how deep is our gratitude to individual Christian priests, it remains an incontrovertible fact that the Christian world, the official Christianity has not done anything to ease our sufferings. The "Holy Father," the pope, who is exercising authority over 360 million believers, had kept silent throughout. He keeps silent even now, after the deed has been done. His one statement would have been enough to calm anti-Semitism which keeps raging in the "Christian Europe."

"Many of you are probably asking themselves: Why have I chosen the evening of Kol Nidre, the most exalted holy day, to tackle this unsettling, one could even say, frightening subject? Believe me, I do not intend to resume the medieval debate between Judaism and Christianity. But there are certain facts which leave me no choice but

to raise this question in public, in both religious and Jewish-national aspect, precisely on the evening of Kol Nidre.

"After the unmitigated, unparalleled disaster visited on our people, at the time when our open wounds have not yet healed, both Catholic and Protestant Christians endeavor to tear off living limbs from our crushed and convulsing Jewish body. This is apostasy, no more no less. They exploit the moral dejection, the apathy, the fear of recurrence of what happened, the "occupation complex." Souls weakened by the calamity fall into their hands. Let it be said openly: Speaking of apostasy I do not mean only those who converted to Christianity in an official ceremony, in church. I also mean the Jews who having adopted Christian disguise during the war, continue living as Christians under the so-called Aryan papers, even now. I have in mind Jews who continue hanging icons in their rooms, who wear cross on their necks, who attend masses in churches, who send their children to study Christianity, who order their lives in accordance with Gentile precepts and customs, while all the while believe that to ease the pangs of their conscience it is enough to attend the Kol Nidre prayer once a year, to bring a few candles to commemorate their murdered families.

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"You, who constitute a large part of this evening's quorum of worshippers in Warsaw, should know that this too amounts to betrayal, to separating oneself from the community. I know that many of you would attempt to hush the voice of their conscience by a pathetic disclaimer: "We are suffering! We are forced converts!" But you should know that you are not telling the truth. The Marranos were forced to convert.

Jews were forcibly converted in Spain and during the recent occupation. But the Marranos suffered agonies of conscience, their souls longed for Judaism and Jewishness, in their cellars and bunkers they remained Jews, and purified their torn souls by their torments. How great is the distance separating the modern "Aryan" Jews of today from the Marranos of the past. How broken are their spirits. I do not have in mind those who have estranged themselves so completely that they even fail to turn up once a year for the Kol Nidre service. I speak only to you, in the depths of whose soul the Jewish spark is still alive, whose heart still quickens at the sight of our ancient 22 square letters, at the sound of Jewish melody, Jewish prayer. Those who are still responsive to the echoes of Jewish life in the past. My words are aimed at you and on your account I chose to speak about this subject tonight. Sever your ties with people whose hands are still stained with the blood of the Jews of Kielce. Remove your children from their religion classes. The time has come for you to discard the Aryan disguise and to put an end to your present condition which is neither human nor Jewish. Let the words of Jonah the prophet guide you: "I am a Hebrew and I worship the Lord of heaven." I am a proud Jew, a straight-backed Jew, a Jew possessed of national pride, and I worship the Lord, maker of heaven and earth, amen.

Comment on Apostasy during the Holocaust

I have before me a booklet issued in July 1968 by Christian Social Association (Chrzescianske Stowarzyszenie Spoleczne) in Warsaw, entitled "The Act of Christian Compassion (Polish Catholic Clergy and

Jews during Nazi Occupation)." The booklet contains an attack on the Zionist movement, Zionist institutions and individual Jews saved by Polish clergymen. They the Jews, the booklet alleges, villify the Polish people and Catholic clergy for their hostile attitude toward the Jews under German occupation. The authors buttress their arguments by quoting numerous cases of Catholic priests who risked their lives to save Jews. Most of the accounts appear to be truthful; the priests who behaved in this fashion certainly deserve the title of the Righteous among the Nations. The booklet's authors also claim that the priests in question did not take advantage of the difficult situation of their persecuted charges and refrained from forcing them to convert.

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Following are several verbatim excerpts from the booklet; no comment is necessary, they speak for themselves:

"In 1942 a sixteen-year-old boy came to the priest Stanislaw Falkowski, then assistant to the vicar of the congregation of Piekuty (sub-district of Wysokie Mazowieckie), asking for help. He claimed to be the son of Prof. Tibishes of Lodz, director of synagogue choirs in Poland before 1939. En route from the Warsaw ghetto to Treblinka he had jumped off the train through the window and then kept eluding the Germans, wondering from one provincial ghetto to another [...] until he met priest Perkowski, shepherd of the Hodyszow congregation and now rector of the seminary in Lomza. Priest Perkowski found him lodgings with one of his flock and when the boy was in the danger of being discovered, he transferred him to the nearby Piekuty.

"I hosted him in my room for several weeks. We talked for hours on

end, I instructed him in the basics of the Catholic faith so as to facilitate his adjustment to the Christian surroundings where I intended to shelter him.

"On March 25, 1943, I baptized him in the Piekuty church giving him his original name, Jozef. I did all this with the knowledge and assistance of the vicar of Piekuty, Roch-Modzilewski who displayed great courage and tenacity in rendering help to the oppressed [...]" (p. 67).

"Priest Jan Przysucha of Mokre Lipie was beaten and then brought to prison. After another savage beating we was told to compile a list of Jews hiding in the area. Similar suspicions were also cast on priest S. Kapalski of Szczebrzeszyn who fought valiantly to have his church opened and <u>who had the courage to resist the demand not to baptize Jews asking to be converted</u> (emphasis mine - D.K.). Dramatic events in this connection occurred almost daily [...] In the citadel of Lublin priest Jan Kazimierczak of Lysobyki and an organizer of armed resistance died a cruel death. The Germans accused him of preparing Jewish children for conversion and issuing forged papers to hide Jews." (pp. 88-89).

"[...] Members of the congregations, particularly the Jews, remembered with great fondness the priest Andrzej Osiekowicz, the first vicar of Boryslaw. From the first days of the war he took active part in the activities of the Relief Committee, was active in rendering assistance to the needy, and without any second thoughts dispensed advise to the Jewish population, supported them, supplied them with birth ceritificates, showed them suitable hide-outs, baptized children, and gave them names fitting the national milieu in Boryslaw. Several

dozen of Jewish families owe him their survival" (p. 90).

"[...] The Gestapo kept following the priest S. Kulig incessantly, demanding to have him supply a list of Jews and afterwards the list of Jews who had converted as adults. The Gestapo examined the register of births and deaths, promulgated the ban on converting Jews and on maintaining the relations of spiritual shepherd-faithful. Priest Kulig warned the Jews of imminent Gestapo searches, advised them of hiding places, and related to them the terrible fate of the Jews of Tarnow, Pilzen and Wiasla. (p. 96).

"[...] Bishop Komar did not relinquish the right of the Church to convert to Christianity or of granting the baptized the same rights as enjoyed by Christian population. Bishop Komar never consented to placing the Jews outside the Church [...]" (p. 101).

"A circular letter promulgated in 1942 banned the clergy from baptizing Jews. Parents were required to bring to the baptism ceremony a signed declaration confirming that the children brought for the ceremony were of Ayran origins and that all participants were also Aryans. Special regulations appended to the circular letter defined who was to be considered Aryan. Finally, Polish clergy was forbidden to provide any religious service to the Folksdeutschen and indigenous Germans.

"Obviously these decrees and regulations were not complied with since in Chruch's view they contradicted both the natural and divine laws. No one familiar with the fundamentals of the Christian faith could order the priests to refuse baptizing Jews fleeing from the ghettoes. In particular, baptism of a Jewish child was preceded by

preparation of its parents to instruct them in their moral and religious duties. Thanks to this action a number of Jews who had escaped from the ghetto survived the war. (p. 103)

The Last Stage 1948-1949: Emigration, Community Regulations, Ritual Slaughter, the Number of Jews in Poland

There is no doubt that from July 1944 onward most Polish Jews had one goal only: to get out of the country and reach the Land of Israel one way or another.

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The Kielce pogrom and the establishemnt of the State of Israel greatly strengthened Zionist consciousness. Everyone, including youth and small children, participated in the festivities celebrating the establishment of the state. For us Polish Jews the news carried special significance; our meaningless wanderings across lands and seas came to an end. The Jewish state came into being, opening its gates like a loving mother to its lost children. The day on which Israeli Ambassador presented his credentials to the President of Poland, Boleslaw Bierut, was a great holiday for the surviving Polish Jews. Opening of the Israeli Embassy in Warsaw brought in its wake many visitors from Israel; some arrived to visit relatives, others to take care of the property they had left behind in Poland, still others on business. Large number of Jews from Israel and Diaspora arrived for the ceremony of unveiling the monument commemorating the Warsaw ghetto fighters. For the first time after the war the surviving remnant met face to face with Jews from Israel and representatives of world Jewry. Jewish

delegations from Communist countries such as Romania, Hungary and Czechoslovakia also arrived. The memorial, executed by a reputed sculptor Nathan Rapaport, left powerful impression on the spectators. The ceremony of unveiling took place under open sky, on the ruins of the Warsaw ghetto in the presence of five thousand people. An open Arc of the Law was brought especially for the occasion; its curtain was made of shreds of prayer shawls gathered from various ghettoes. The speeches, and meetings with Jews from abroad who had not undergone the Holocaust turned into a mighty demonstration of the unity of Jewish people scattered throughout the world. The Holocaust had not broken us; we were here again.

Under the impact of these events even those Jews who still contemplated to remain in Poland, began settling their affairs with the view to imigrating to Israel. The flight movement had discontinued; Jewish emigration proceeded at a very slow pace through the Emigration Department of the Foreign Ministry. In late summer 1948 the situation deteriorated as emigration of Jews from Poland practically ground to a halt. This state of affairs continued until June 25, 1949. It appears that the deterioration resulted directly from the worsening of diplomatic relations between the Jewish State and Poland. This situation lasted eight months; in the meantime the Polish government reassessed its policy toward emigration of Jews from the country.

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On June 15, 1949 I received a telephone call from the Department of Religious Affairs informing me of a meeting to be held at the Interior Ministry between the board of the Committee of Religious Congregations

and Minister Wladyslaw Walski. Our delegation comprised rabbi Shalom Treistman of Wroclaw and Lower Silesia, Yosef Atlas, chairman of the Lodz community and this author as chairman of the Rabbis' Council and of the Committee of Religious Congregations in Poland. Two subjects were on the agenda: charter of religious communities in Poland and emigration. The Minister began with questions of emigration. Although he had discussed the subject first with the Central Committee of Jews in Poland he saw it necessary to involve us too. According to Walski, Polish government decided to allow official emigration of Jews to Israel. Polish policy makers were aware of the fact that Jewish survivors experienced difficulty in living on the graves of millions of their exterminated co-religionists. In addition, they empathised with the psychological need to reunite with relatives living abroad, particularly in the State of Israel. He added that the first to leave would be probably Jews ideologically committed to the Zionist movement. At the same time, however, he emphasized that the Jews who chose to stay would enjoy complete equality of rights with the state assuming full responsibility for their social needs and economic development. Asked whether we would be allowed to publish his announcement in the press, the Minister replied positively adding, "We too shall proclaim it as an official announcement about one month from now."

On September 4, 1949, the semi-official organ of the government, Rzeczpospolita, published the following:

Travel to Israel: Announcement of the Ministry of Public Administration

In connection with applications arriving to the Ministry of Public Administration, seeking emigration permits from Poland to the State of

Israel, the Ministry informs the public about the procedures to be followed by the applicants:

1. Applications for issuing documents for permanent emigration to the State of Israel are to be submitted to the Passport Section of the Ministry of Public Administration.

2. The applicants are required to submit identity documents in lieu of which they will be issued special identity document allowing them to travel to Israel."

The Passport Section prepared special forms:

"To the Ministry of Public Administration:

I hereby apply for a travel document to the State of Israel in which I seek to settle, to become its citizen and thereby discontinue my Polish nationality."

The Israeli Embassy supplied the following document to the applicants:

State of Israel, Consulate in Poland, Warsaw, date.

We confirm that citizen so and so will receive entry visa to the State of Israel after presenting a valid foreign passport.

Signed: Director of the Consular Section, Dr. Israel Carmel."

This was the so-called promessa which every Jewish applicant for emigration was required to attach to his application. It is noteworthy that the Israeli Embassy decided to limit the number of promessas "so as to prevent their being turned into a worthless piece of paper." So, as it turned out, Israel opened its gates wide to every immigrant, the Polish government allowed in every Jew seeking to immigrate, but our Embassy still adhered to the resolution adopted by the Zionist

Executive in London in 1946, setting quotas certain on immigrants.

The following is the text of a letter from the Consulate of Israel in Poland to the Foreign Ministry:

Foreign Ministry

Eastern European Section

Hakirya Warsaw, February 8, 1949

Re: Promessas to members of Agudat Israel

Both the Foreign Ministry and the Ministry of Immigration have several times sent their comments on the handling of immigration of members of Agudath Israel. In our cable of January 23, we explained the matter briefly and said that more extensive reply would be forthcoming.

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The handling of immigration of members of various political parties by the Israeli office was based on the agreement reached at the meeting of the Zionist Executive in London in 1946. The agreement set the following quotas: Mizrahi - 11%; Hashomer Hatzair - 11%; Mapai - 11%. This arrangement was introduced three years ago. Changes in Polish Jewry brought about by emigration of large numbers of Jews necessitated revisions in this arrangment. In fact, we were approached by representatives of various political parties who requested revisions in the inter-party agreement. As we did not regard ourselves authorized to undertake the revisions, we advised them to turn to a supreme Zionist body. In the meantime we continue issuing promessas in accordance with the existing arrangement.

The aforesaid arrangement excluded two parties: Agudat Israel and Poaley Agudat Israel. In our talks with these two parties we offered

them to meet from time to time in order to set a quota of promessas for their members. A final agreement was reached with Poaley Agudat Israel and they have no complaints. In contrast, representatives of Agudah claim to be discriminated and refuse to accept the arrangement we proposed. At the meeting with the delegation of Agudat Israel on January 24, they claimed that "the discrimination against us by the Ministry in Israel has not yet been corrected by the Consulate." They demanded to be issued 75 promessas for families as a compensation for past injustices, and that in the future 10% of all promessass for political parties be issued to them. I explained to them the immigration situation and the necessity to limit the number of promessass issued by us so as to prevent their depreciation. At this stage of negotiations between us and the authorities on immigration matters it is still too early to work out a permanent arrangement. Once the arrangement is concluded we shall request proof of the legitimacy of their requests. We will not be able to issue the 75 family promessas (over this period of time we issued 100 family promessas for all the other parties combined).In view of the fact that they insisted on "large number [of promessas] to rectify past discrimination," I offered them to submit the subject for a debate among the Consulate staff. At the plenary session of the staff it was decided to allocate 10 family promessas for them (Mapai, Hashomer Hatzair and Mizrahi received 7 family promessas each). Agudat Israel refused to accept this arrangement.

The promessas are issued in accordance with the following considerations:

1. Recommendations from Israel;

2. The arrangement with the political parties (see above);

3. In special cases, according to recommendation of the Consulate staff or other institutions.

The first and third criteria have nothing to do with party membership, and members of Agudat Israel are treated as all other Jews. On the other hand, the second criterion refers to such membership and compels us to act in keeping with the provisions of the arrangement, with all the parties treated on equal terms.

Signed: E. Uchmani, Consulate Advisor

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The question of charter for communities (status) was of particular significance for us. In fact this was the second subject discussed in depth during the meeting with Minister Walski. We raised a number of objections to the proposed charter; they are spelled out in my report submitted at the seventh plenary meeting of the Committee of Religious Congregations in Warsaw on September 30, 1949. This was the last meeting I chaired prior to my departure from Poland to Israel.

Following are excerpts from the seventh plenary meeting of the Committee of Religious Congregations, September 30, 1949, in Warsaw:

Opening remarks by Rabbi D. Kahane, chairman of the Committee:

"The seventh plenary meeting of the Committee of Religious Congregations in Poland has convened after one year. During that period important and momentous events occurred in the Jewish world in Poland and abroad. The Jewish community in Poland, small in numbers but dynamic and vital has consolidated and stabilized. Today we are marking

the conclusion of the period of recovery, five years of prodigious labor devoted to shaping religious life of Jews in Poland in the form of a charter, namely the law enacted by the government, which at last regulates the legal status of religious communities in Poland.

"During that time we have sustained heavy losses, but, at the same time we scored great successes.

"Let me begin with the losses. Last year Jewish religious world lost two great figures, powerful leaders whose lives and activities left a profound imprint on Judaism world over. Last year, on the first day of Pantecost, the Gur Rabbi, Avraham Mordechai Alter, passed away. During the last Passover, the President of the World Mizrahi Organization, Rabbi Meir Bar-Ilan died. These two spiritual giants had no equal in the world of religious Jewry. The Gur Rabbi symbolized the old, true and authentic spirit of Polish Jewry of the past, being a personification of what we call "the spirit of Patriarch Jacob."

Rabbi Meir Bar-Ilan, who followed in his great father footsteps' in treasuring and cherishing Jewish religion, fought for national liberation, for the independent existence of Jews on their land. His heart filled with love of Israel and its land, with burning love of the holy city of Jerusalem, burned also with the holy fire of fidelity to the Law of God, to the Land of Israel in the spirit of the Torah and tradition.

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Both gave up their pure ghosts in the holy city of Jerusalem. The Gur Rabbi passed away during the siege, the fierce war for Hebrew Jerusalem and the Jewish state. Rabbi Meir Bar-Ilan passed away at the

time when the Jewish State, already an acomplished fact, recognized by the family of nations, had slowly consolidated, staged its first elections, opened the first Jewish parliament, the Knesset, which we had been waiting for nearly two thousand years. In honoring the memory of these two great Jewish leaders, we also honor all those who gave their lives for the liberty of our people and the redemption of our land, to the heroes of the Israel Defence Forces whose blood drenched the soil of the land, sanctifying the covenant between the Jewish people and the land of Israel. May their souls be bound in the bond of life.

"In the past year important events took place in Poland. Today, when the Committee of Religious Congregations faces two momentous changes, namely adjustment of the Jewish religious life to the new status quo in the country, and election of the new chairman, it is only proper to give a brief review of the current situation of religion in Poland.

"What was the goal which the people who began the task of reorganization of Jewish religious life in Poland set for themselves?

"The tiny group which in November 1944 began negotiations with various official institutions aimed at establishing the legal basis for Jewish religion in Poland, set for itself the following objectives:

"In the aftermath of the unparalleled disaster which swept one third of our people, including over three million of Polish Jews, the task was to restore, rebuild, reorganize and consolidate Jewish religious life in Poland, give encouragement to the survivors, carry on the golden tradition of the past glory of Polish Jewry, to cooperate

with all the organizations and groups in the country to strengthen the new Jewish community. It is to be noted that the goal of restoration was to be pursued on the basis of positive and loyal attitude to the new Polish reality, taking into account all the transformations and changes occuring in the Polish society, without, however, compromising our national-religious ties to the enterprise of building Jewish national home in the Land of Israel. These objectives can be stated briefly as follows:

1. Reconstituting our lives in accordance with the new reality;
2. Positive and loyal attitude toward the new reality in Poland;
3. Keeping alive the idea of return to Zion.

Let me recount our accomplishments in each of these areas.

1. Revival of our religious life

In setting about the rebuilding of religious life on the ruins of Polish Jewry we took into consideration the framework of the past. We were faced with a choice: to follow the example of the Reform Judaism existing in Western Europe and the United States, or the traditional Orthodox Judaism. Needless to say we chose the second option. Today the religious Jewry in Poland, all our communities and the Committee of Religious Congregations are unmistakably orthodox. In rebuilding the religious life in Poland we went in the footsteps of neither Mendelsohn, nor Philipsohn, nor Zunz, nor Geiger, not even the late Stephen Wise, or the reform rabbis of America. We took our example from Polish Jewry of the past, true, authentic, colorful Jewry, not a substitute. The examples of Shabbtai Cohen (17th century commentator on Shulkhan Arukh), Turei Zahav (Golden columns, a book), Rabbi Moshe

Isserlish, the rabbi of Ostrowce, the rabbi of Belz, rabbi Izhak Shmelkes, rabbi Meir Shapiro, rabbi Shmuel Moholiver, rabbi Nissenboim, rabbi Leibele Broyde and rabbi Menachem Zemba; the spirit they embodied touched us when we laid the foundations of our communities in the postwar Poland. The question of whether this or another rabbi had acquired academic education or adopted European customs was immaterial. What mattered was the underlying idea, the method. I am satisfied to determine that the underlying idea and method are Orthodox and the contents are national-religious.

We tried to attract all Jewish groups to our rehabilitation campaign. We appealed to every Jew regardless of his party affiliation, to every Jew who still believes in God, in whose heart the Jewish spark is still alive. As official representatives of Jewish faith, a non-political body, we were willing to spread our canopy over all Jews who had gone through death throes for the five years of the war, whose soul longed after Jewish melodies, Jewish tradition and customs. I must note with regret that not all Polish Jews took part in our rehabilitation work. Those who did included the extreme religious groups, national-religious moderates, and some Zionist groups. At the same time, however, it would be a mistake to maintain that the remaining Jewish groups opposed or expressed hostility to our work. One needed only to visit the synagogues and houses of prayer packed with worshippers on holy days to realize that Israel had not yet been widowed, and that with the exception of a small group of atheists Polish Jews had not yet severed all the bonds tying them with Judaism.

We did not regard it necessary to keep records of all members of

our communities; in our view a Jew who comes to pray once a year, on Yom Kippur, belongs to a kehilla. According to this criterion we estimate that our activities encompass 70% of the Jewish population of Poland (in September 1949 we estimated the total number of Jews in the country at eighty thousand). Details of our work are to be found in our bulletin and various reports. Here I would like to mention one item: in five years we have succeeded in establishing a network of communities throughout the country with each community operating all the necessary communal institutions. All that is needed for the remaining Polish Jews to live full Jewish lives are rabbis and religious instructors. The shortage of rabbis has reached catastrophic proportions. Here I cannot help but express my bitterness toward our fraternal institutions abroad. We appealed to them on more than one occasion, we made desperate appeals but to our deep regret no one had responded.

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2. Positive attitude to the present Polish reality

We discussed this subject at the last rabbis' meeting, in the summer of 1949, and since then we discussed it several times in other forums. Now, our attitude to the new Polish reality is so simple, so self-evident, that there is hardly any need to dwell again on the subject. It should be quite clear to every sensible person that had it not been for the deeply humanitarian and vigorous stance of Polish government institutions, we would have witnessed many Kielce-style riots. Polish reaction does not let down its guard. Polish local brand of fascism has not been completely uprooted. Readers of reports on the trial of Doboszynski could easily picture for themselves the kind of educational

food fed to the Polish population by the Sanacja regime before the war. Today the democratic Polish government takes pains to diminish the gulf of the sometimes savage hatred separating Pole from Jew, one citizen from another. The Jews certainly know how to appreciate these efforts.

Although the attitude of Jewish official and semi-official bodies toward us is not always correct and consistent, the official representatives of the government have always treated us with friendliness. Officially, we are subordinated to the Department for Religious Affairs of the Ministry of Public Administration. Since 1945 we attempted to have the Ministry to grant an official status to Jewish religious communities in Poland. Unfortunately, until now our efforts have failed to produce effects. There is no doubt that certain individuals and institutions in Poland regarded a legally incorporated Jewish religious community as a thorn in their side.

On June 25 I headed a delegation which met with the Minister of Public Administration Wladyslaw Walski to discuss this and other matters. I succeeded in convincing the Minister of the importance of granting us an official status from the point of Polish raison d'etat. Having heard from the Minister about his positive attitude to the subject of official status, I made the following presentation to him:

Two proposals regarding the status of the kehilla have been submitted to the Department of Religious Affairs. One was submitted by the country-wide convention of Jewish communities in Katowice in November 1947, and the second probably by circles close to the Central Committee of Jews in Poland. The second proposal contains two items which remain unacceptable to us; they speak of the organic connection

between the Committee of Religious Congregations and the Central Committee of Jews in Poland. If the second proposal is approved, we will become a mere department of religious affairs of the Central Committee.

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Minister Walski's reply was open and clear-cut.

He does not even consider subordinating religious life of Jews in Poland to the Central Committee. The paragraphs on the organic connection with the Central Committee will not be included in the proposed official charter. He himself has reservations regarding the existence of the Central Committee; this body had a right to exist in the first years after the war but now many Poles regard it as a special Jewish ghetto.

I regard Minister Walski's statement as an important foundation of our existence. It clarifies the issue so important to us and nullifies all kind of extraneous "commentaries." In addition, our meeting covered other important matters, such as ritual slaughter, for example, particularly in Warsaw. At present Warsaw is the only city in Poland without ritual slaughter due to the obduracy of the municipal council. We also submitted a demand for rent fees for the community buildings, asked for subvention for the building of a well-known synagogue "Rotunda" in the Warsaw suburb of Praga, and a subvention for the restoration of a synagogue in Wroclaw. The Minister promised to consider and respond favorably to our request.

The first positive outcome of this meeting is the official charter. Certainly, it is not perfect. Not all the resolutions adopted by the

Katowice convention have been incorporated into it. In addition, it narrows the scope the activities within the kehilla jurisdiction. At the same time, however, we welcome the proclamation of the charter, which finally clarifies the uncertain and uncomfortable situation of Jewish religious communities in the country. Henceforth the Jewish kehilla is a legal, independent, public institution. However, it contains one paragraph, very painful to us national-religious Jews.

3. As religious Jews we will not be able to forget the idea of Return to Zion

Judaism is not cosmopolitic. We have never hunted for souls. Our motto has been: "converts to Israel are like a sore in the skin." Jewish faith has an eminently national character. Judaism has always been identified with the Jewish people and the Jewish law. "Torah, Israel and the Holy One Blessed be He, are one." This is why we have been hurt by the fact that the Minister of Public Administration removed the word "Jew" from the charter; instead it speaks of congregation of citizens of Mosaic faith, Mosaic congregation of a voivodship (province), and of Mosaic congregations in Poland. The term

"Jew" is replaced by appelation "of Mosaic faith" (wyznanie Mojzeszowe). Moses our teacher received the Torah on Mount Sinai on behalf of the Jews. The Bible says: "Moses has ordained us in Torah, the tradition of the congregation of Jacob," and "He spoke to the children of Israel." Moses spoke neither to Englishmen of Mosaic faith, nor to the Frenchmen of Mosaic faith, nor to Poles of Mosaic faith. Jews have Jewish religion. In our view the current appelation "Jewish

religious congregation" (Zydowska kongregacja wyznaniowa) does by no means contradict political interests of the democratic Poland, whereas "Congreagation of Mosaic faith" (Kongregacja wyznania Mojzeszowego) does not fit the traditions of Polish Jewry.

As national-religious Jews who recite "We shall behold your merciful return to Zion" three times a day, who have not desisted from believing in the ingathering of exiles, we could not forget the idea of return to Zion and the commandment of settling the Land of Israel. Together with all religious Jews in the world we regard the revival of the state of Israel, the declaration of independence of the Jewish State as the act of divine justice, the fulfillment of Lord's promise "Arise and walk through the length and breadth of the country which I shall give thee." The giants of learning, the highest rabbinical authorities concur with this and this is also our belief, the belief of Polish Jewry.

Our attitude to the Central Committee of Jews in Poland

As I have said previously, in our work of rehabilitation we strove to cooperate with all existing Jewish groups to secure the consolidation of Jewish community in Poland. Shortly after liberation a Jewish body was formed in Lublin to serve as a center of all Jewish groups in the country: the Central Committee of Jews in Poland. We heartfully welcomed the establishment of a central democratically managed Jewish institution intended as an umbrella organization for all Polish Jews. Before long, however, we learned that the official leaders of the newly established body harbor if not hostility then negative attitude toward the small religious community. To put it bluntly they

simply kicked us out. One of the then chief spokesmen for the Central Committee described the attempts to rehabilitate the religious Jewish community in Poland as "reviving the dead by administering electric shocks."

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We have not, God forbid, developed a negative attitude toward the Central Committee. We greatly appreciated its achievements in the field of productivization [of the Jewish population] and social welfare. With the merger with the Committee of Religious Congregations, the Central Committee became the political representative of Polish Jews, and as such it has always defended with dignity the interests of Jews both externally and internally. To our regret we cannot say that a great deal has been done in the field of education and in this connection we demand that the Central Committee show some understanding and tolerance toward our principles, at least to the extent shown by the institutions of the Polish democratic government.

These are the thoughts that come to my mind at the opening of our conference. We are standing on the threshold of a new era in our work on behalf of religious life in Poland. I am convinced that the new chairman to be elected today by the honorable delegates will continue to lead the Committee of Religious Congregations on the road we have travelled until now, in ways we have worked, to achieve the objectives we set for ourselves when our institution was formed: revival of religious life of Polish Jews, positive attitude toward the Polish democratic state and fidelity toward the idea of return to Zion.

After prolonged discussion attended by most members of the

Committee, after two days of sessions, rabbi Shalowm Treistman was elected chairms of the Committee and Major Yeshaya Drucker general secretary.

Few words on the number of Jews in Poland after the war

Let it be said right at the outset: no one can provide reliable statistical figures on the number of Polish Jews after the war. No one compiled the necessary statistics and no registration was possible in those stormy days. Masses of people adrift, beyond control of the authorities swept through the country from the liberation until 1950. Repatriation from the Soviet Union, the flight movement, ceaseless emigration - all these precluded arriving at reliable estimates. The figures quoted below were culled from my own notes based on information I received from community leaders and from records of the Statistics Department of the Central Committee of Jews in Poland.

It is widely believed that until May 1945 the number of Jewish survivors in Poland proper was somewhere between 50,000 and 55,000. In 1944 a repatriation accord was signed between Poland and the Soviet Union; it was renewed in the years 1945, 1946, 1947, and 1948. Among other things it allowed Jews Polish nationals to return to Poland. Some 172,000 Jews returned from Russia to Poland in the years 1944-1947.

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An interesting detail: shortly before Passover of 1947 we registrated, together with the Central Committee of Polish Jews, all Jews seeking to receive matzoth (sent to us by JOINT). Nearly 90,000 people responded. It is safe to assume that the 15,000 Jews living on

Aryan papers did not register. These two numbers yield the estimate of the total number of Jews living in Poland in April 1947, of 105,000. In my view this is the only reliable figure for this period.

Again, it is to be borne in mind that Jewish emigration proceeded apace. They returned from the Soviet Union with the idea of emigration uppermost in their minds. At my departure from Poland in September 1949 we estimated the number of Jews there at about 80,000.

The government's announcement resulted in a growing stream of Jewish emigration from Poland. In November 1949 Zionist associations wee dissolved, including General Zionists, Mapai, Mapam, Mizrahi and Agudat Israel; the latter had operated without official recognition thanks to intensive lobbying with the authorities. Later on Jewish National Fund, Jewish Foundation Fund and the JOINT were liquidated too. The official announcement on the liquidation of the JOINT read: "In the face of rehabilitation and integration of massess of Jews in the general effort to raise the economic standards in Poland and to build new centers of cultural life, the particularistic character of JOINT revealed itself as dispensable. The government has assumed the responsibility for the welfare of its Jewish citizens."

How did the Central committee of Jews in Poland respond to this announcement? Their organ Das Neue Lebn of November 25, 1949, published the following under the title "Our Government's statement is absolutely clear":

"The announcement of the Ministry of Public Administration is a document of vital importance for the Jewish public in Poland. It refers twice to the full equality of rights for the Jewish population, and the

government's full responsibility for and willingness to supply the social needs of the Jewish population in Poland.

"Clearly and with determination this announcement deals a crushing blow to the propaganda of gossip and the base incitement unleashed by Zionist reaction here and abroad alleging that the Polish government is interested in Jews leaving the country.

"Our government says loud and clear that "those who leave the country heading for the State of Israel are above all individuals with ideological ties to the Zionist movement." Now what working Jew who upon his return found in the liberated Poland a home, workshop, education for his children, security and growing faith in the brighter future, will embark on a road-no-road leading to camps in Israel,

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deprivation of rights, discrimination, unemployment and homelessness? Only those will go--and our government grants them all the necessary assistance--who are linked with the ideology of Jewish nationalism, the ideology of Zionism."

This was the response of the Central Committee of Jews in Poland.

*

In early 1950 the Central Committee of Jews in Poland was dissolved and replaced by a new body, Social-Cultural Association of Jews in Poland - a clearly communist organization which became the sole representative of Jews and Jewry in Poland.

The circle was completed. A stormy, wonderful chapter in the history of the Jewish community in postwar Poland came to an end. it also marked the liquidation of the one-thousand-year old Polish

diaspora, boasting immense spiritual, cultural and educational achievements. This diaspora sent deep roots in Jewry and its spiritual treasures enriched Jewish communities throughout the world. Last but not least, it made lasting contributions to the building of the State of Israel.

With the last meeting of the Committee of Religious Congregations on November 30, 1949, I regarded my work and duties in Poland as completed. I left behind a legally incorporated and well organized Jewish community in Poland. I do not know how long the newly established Social-Cultural Association will last; in all likelihood it will meet the fate of its predecessor, the Central Committee of Jews in Poland. The community with its center, the synagogue, will continue to exist. Small and impoverished as it is today, one cannot say what future holds in store for it. One must not forget that the small Polish community is a neighbor of a three-million strong Jewish community in the Soviet Union.

In the meantime the community in Poland remains a pale, nearly unrecognizable reflection of the autonomous and diverse Jewish communal existence in the past on the Polish land.

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APPENDICES

Leaflet of the underground organization

Wolnosc i Niepodleglosc - WIN (Freedom and Independence)

Our goal: an independent and free Poland

Honor and the Homeland

Year 1 Warsaw, October 1946 Nos. 9, 10

Jews:

Public opinion in Poland has once again been shocked by the horrid crime perpetrated by Jews in the uniforms of the UB (Security Services) against 160 Poles in the Radom prison. We repeat: Jews against Poles!

This savage murder was unmistakably racist in character. Its victims were defenceless former AK [Armia Krajowa - Home Army, the largest underground organization fighting the German occupation in Poland] members. Among them was one of the most gifted painters of the young generation, Kazimierz Markwert, whose father had been tortured to death by the Gestapo.

The background of this affair was as follows: the Jews were given permission by the security services "to execute" over a hundred Poles as "compensation" for Kielce. The crime was committed in the prison cells. The victims were suspended from butcher hooks. Resisters were dealt with harshly. We learned all this from fragmentary reports but it is enough.

It is enough for the problem to be posed clearly: we forcefully demand that those responsible for the moral health of society raise their voices on the subject of Radom and other actions of Jews in

Poland. Let the rabbis state their position, let the scholars, artists and writers voice their views as did Poles on Kielce. Let them raise their voice and denounce the Jewish hoodlooms and degenerates in the UB uniforms.

If this is not done, we shall be forced to place the blame for this crime on all Polish Jews as a single hostile collectivity. We are not anti-Semites but with us the interest of our people takes precedence over everything else.

Leaflet addressed to the Jewish population

Jews, you have undergone the persecutions by Hitler and each one of you who survived owes his life only to Poles. Now after the entry of the Red Army you crawled out of your hide-outs only to oppress and exploit the true Poles. What is even more painful you are now delivering to murderers those who reached out to you in the most critical moments.

Jews: Because you have revealed yourselves as enemies of Poles we order you to leave Piaski within a week. If not we shall take necessary measures against you.

Lublin, April 3, 1945 Round stamp with the Polish national emblem

Anti-Semitic Phenomena in Poland and Combat Against them

Government Bulletin on Struggle against Underground - Jan. 15, 1946

I

Results of actions against Jews

According to our information in the last year, i.e. from November

1944 to December 1945, the number of Jews killed in various Voivodships was as follows:

Voivodship of Warsaw	57
Voivodship of Lublin	64
Voivodship of Cracow	15
Voivodship of Bialystok	38
Voivodship of Rzeszow	34
Voivodship of Kielce	79
Voivodship of Lodz	51
Voivodship of Pomorze	5
Voivodship of Silesia	3
Total	346

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It is noteworthy that by and large the murders were committed in smaller localities, whereas the number of victims in larger cities was minimal.

The majority of murders were committed in the voivodships of Kielce and Lublin where reactionary gangs instructed by foreign centers still hide out in the forests. It is to be emphasized that the murdered had returned from German camps or were veterans of partisan stuggle.

There were many women among the victims (69), as well as children. Anti-Jewish acts are usually carried out in one of the following forms:
1. Planned provocations: Someone floats the rumor about a Jew having murdered a Polish child. Immediately a witness appears who knows about a Jew who murdered a Polish child to get his blood ("for matzoth"; the intelligentsia says: "for injections"). A mob gathers, shouting, "Jews

are murdering Polish children," "We shall avenge the blood of our children." At that point a group materializes whose members set about beating and robbing Jewish passers-by, and breaking into Jewish apartments. Usually the action takes place near residences of the Jews. The organizers have precise knowledge of the locations of these residences in the district. Often these actions end in murder.

Incidents of this kind took place in Lublin, Rzeszow, Cracow, Tarnow and Sosnowiec.

2. Blackmail which ended in murder: in Bialobrzegi, Irena, and Pruszkow.

3. Murder and looting: Ryrog, the Bialobrzegi district, Oswiecin, Grojec, Gliwice, Belzie, Miechow, Rozyn, Radom, Tokarnia, Irena, Gniewoszow and other places.

4. Attack without looting: in Bialobrzegi a grenade was lobbed into the shelter of the Jewish Committee. In Grojec, Racjonerz Sansk, Brzeszcze, Skaryszew and Piotrkow Trybunalski the attacks ended in murder.

II

Typical instances of actions against Jews

1. Blackmail: it somewhat resembles the actions of szmalcowniki who during occupation extorted money from Jews under the threat of turning them over to the Gestapo; now the blackmailers operate on behalf of NSZ (National Armed Forces), imposing fines on the Jews and setting deadlines to leave their localitty.

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2. The attacks are carried out on orders from above. This is borne out not only by the uniform method of attack but also by the fact that the

attacks are carried out simultaneously in several places. At the same time reactionary centers conduct propaganda calling for extermination of the Jews. The attacks were carried out by organized gangs. Thus, for instance, a gang of 20 people attacked the Jewish Committee in Opatow (on September 6); in Osycin an armed gang of 60 people carried out the attack (compare Sep. 26), and so on.

3. The attacks reached their peak in the months March-August. In Bialystok, for instance, out of 38 attacks, 32 occurred in March alone; of the total of 60 murders in the voivodship of Lublin, 28 occurred in March and 21 in August. From October onward the number of attacks diminishes rapidly. In the last month there has been an upsurge in attacks against Jews (Skarzyski, Wielun).

4. Such operations are preceded by dissemination of slogans such as: "The Jews occupy all the senior positions in ministries, offices, courts, district administration, departments, etc."; "They plunder the country in cooperation with the Soviets." It is to be noted that the reaction regards every functionary of the democratic camp not to its liking as a Jew. The gangs murder not only Jews, but state officials, members of the democratic parties, particularly the PPR (Polish Workers Party).

An NSZ gang "Blyskawica" (Lightning) of ten members was brought to trial before the Supreme Military Court in Lodz. It was headed by one Grabski, code name "Expert." A cashe of explosives was discovered in Grabski's home. In his testimony to the court Grabski said: "The explosives were meant to manufacture time bombs to destroy Jewish homes and businesses. The arms were stockpiled in connection with the coming

elections."

Meanwhile members of the gang murdered a worker activist and PPR member Zakrzewski, as well as others.

III

Who is to blame for the bloodshed?

Below we quote several other documents, without presenting the entire literature of NSZ, AK and other reactionary groups.

1. Directive of the NSZ Command to the district command, March 25, 1945, concerning preparations for terrorist actions:

To the district command chief 02, for Edward 03:

On March 25, 1945 I received the district organization report. I recommend that the following orders be executed swiftly:

1. German and Soviet spies (on behalf of NKWD);
2. Declared major PPR and PKWN (Polish Committee of National Liberation) functionaries;

3. All Jews and Jewesses;
4. All those who sheltered Jews during German occupation;
5. Deliver the names of wicked activists and officials who work conscientiously against Polish patriots and citizens;
6. Report locations of police stations, their arsenals, telephones, etc.

Signed: Polan

2. The following leaflet appeared in Tarnow:

"Strike at the Jews!

"For the murder of Polish children in Cracow, in the synagogue on

Starowislana Street, revenge, OZN."

The district leadership of PSL (Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe - Polish Peasant Party) in Cracow organized courses of instruction for propaganda lectures in the disctricts. At the gathering of students of courses 6, 7 this month, the following delivered lectures: Dr. Buczak, Dr. Marcinkowski, Dr. Mierzwa, Dr. Merzyk (all leaders of the PSL).

All speakers dwelt on the guidelines for propaganda campaign among the peasant masses:

"The PSL's main offensive is directed against the PPR. Blunders of the National Unity Government are to be tendentiously exaggerated (economic difficulties, etc. Hatred of Russians and our regime here).

"Emphasize constantly that Jews are the main rulers of Poland and that the Jew is a communist. PSL must take position demanding that Jews be prevented from reaching all posts."

At a meeting on August 19, 1945, Lesniak, a PSL functionary from Limanowa, in the Cracow voivodship, said the following:

"We won Poland but not the Poland we waited for. We have Poland, but it is a Jewish Poland. Jews hold all the posts. Let the UBP (Office of Public Security) arrest the Jews and not the Poles."

In a resolution adopted by the conference of peasant youth Wici we read:

"We demand that international Jewry which aims at the defeat of all the peoples in the world be removed from our country's life."

It is quite obvious that the reaction harbors Nazi zoological hatred toward the Jews. They spread rumors to the effect that Jews are accorded preferential treatment, chanelling for themselves all UNRA

parcels, that each Jewess giving birth is given 20,000 zloty, and so forth.

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When an attempt was made to organize a strike in one of the Lodz plants in protest against employing a Jew, the aim was not only protest but slowing down the pace of rehabilitation of industry as well. This is borne out by the fact that later on they attempted to stage an economic strike.

IV

The struggle against anti-Semitism

The struggle is being waged country-wide despite initial difficulties stemming from the fact that the reaction placed its own people in the administration. Thus, for example, the town mayor of Dezejska, voivodship of Rzeszow, Kaczmarczyk, together with the German Schmidt had been a member of a gang which murdered Jews. In Gniewoszow, voivodship Kielce, two policemen, Komorka and Majewski, were put on trial on charges of blackmailing Jews.

In many cases preventive measures were taken and thanks to the forceful stance of the UBP riots were forestalled. These measures were taken, for example, in an attempt of provocation against the Jews in Nowy Sacz (August 20, 1945), an attempt to attack Jewish orphanage in Rabka (August 20, 1945), preparations for the "blood libel" provocation in Lublin (September 19, 1945) and in Sosnowiec (October 25, 1945), and in other localities. Persons charged with actions against the Jews were put on trial in Cracow, Lublin, Rzeszow, Lodz, Warsaw and other places. They received death sentences or prison terms.

Many trials of this kind dealt not only with the Jewish aspect, since nearly all these hoodlums had on their conscience other crimes, such as collaboration with the Germans, murder of officials and employees of public security, members of democratic parties, and so on. It is to be noted that that the pre-September [1939] penal law did not provide for special punishments for crimes motivated by race, nationality or religion. This fact enabled a number of jurists and judges, vestiges of the old regime, to refrain from handing down the appropriate punishment; they acted out of formal, bureaucratic reasons, or simply out of personal or idelogical sympathy with the defendants.

This loophole has since then been corrected and the reaction has thereby been deprived of this option through the decree of the Ministerial Council of the Government of National Unity promulgated on September 16, 1945, concerning special courts. Paragraph 7 of the decree refers to "deliberate abuse of powers, or evading service duty by an official." (see chapter one, K.K 286).

Paragraph 1 reads:

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"Violent acts against persons or groups of population on grounds of their national affiliation, race or religion, participation in gatherings of crowds facilitating such acts, as well as conspiring to perform them" (chapters 22, 23, in the decree of November 6, 1945, concerning particularly dangerous crimes in the period of rebuilding of the country).

The camp of democracy and its executive apparatus, the Government of National Unity, standing on the basis of true freedom and equality

of all before the law and the state, is aware of the dangers entailed by anti-Semitic attacks in the form of vile murders or pogrom propaganda (the reactions changes its tactics frequently). Knowing that the blade of this knife is aimed at the camp of democracy, of the integrity and unity of the democratic Poland, it takes special care of the Jewish population, victim of the Fascist-Nazi reaction. This care expresses itself in the assistance of the administrative authorities to assure personal safety, as well as material assistance in rebuilding the destroyed workshops and enlisting the Jewish population in the general effort to rebuild the country.

Zippora Strowinski, Yehiel Friedman, Avraham Parsel, Shmuel Richbard of Blessed Memory (the name of the fifth victim has slipped my memory)

At the fresh grave of the five members of Kibbutz of Mizrahi, who were murdered by Polish underground in the spring of 1946, on the ceremony of unveiling the tombstone.

It was not long ago: early in the year, on a balmy Saturday night I gathered together with you around the table in kibbutz in Lodz. We were gay and sang songs together. Finally we could breathe freely after the opressing, dark nightmare of occupation. Together we hoped and dreamed about better future in our Holy Land. It seems it was only yesterday that I spoke to you, marvelling at your joy of life, your enthusiasm, your pure faith, almost childish as it gleamed in your bright eyes: "Tomorrow will be better," tomorrow we shall build our happiness in Zion and Jerusalem. Tomorrow, or the day after tomorrow we shall finally be comforted by Zion and be granted what was refused to our fathers and mothers who perished.

It seems it was only yesterday. And then, without warning everything stood still and disappeared, struck off by a brute, beastly hand. Like shadows we went to accompany you on your way to eternal rest. We were stunned and confused. We refused to accept the testimony of our own eyes. As then, we still cannot grasp how people who had fought so hard for their freedom, whose flesh still bore the marks of the yoke of occupation, the people who have always prided themselves and repeated the nice and pious, allegedly Christian, commandment to love one's neighbor, how could they use pious patriotism to conceal the

hands of such savage, bloodthirsty beast? How could they commit such dastardly murder of innocent children who had just evaded the clutches of the German murderers? For us Jews to whom "Thou shalt not murder" is not just an empty saying, this act remains an enigma. We shall never be able to understand it. What we must do, however, is to draw conclusions. Time has come to make it crystal clear to ourselves that the grave at which we are now standing together with dozens, perhaps hundreds of graves of Polish Jews who fell at the hands of fascist murderers already after the liberation of Poland, must become a memento to us. Wherever we go, on whatever land we set our feet, whichever continent we will live on - everywhere the same thing that happened to our blessed young friends of kibbutz Lodz can happen to us. If not physical than spiritual death, if not now then in ten or fifty years. Death, in all its forms and shades awaits us on the land we were not called to step upon. There is only one land in the world where we would be able to breathe freely, the land which was the goal of your lives.

You did not live to see the realization of your dreams. You did not live to hear and see the growth of the just born Jewish state. Your bright eyes closed, your lips went numb, your hearts turned to stone. Under this new tombstone erected by your friends you rest together. Loving and fair in life you did not part in death. You lived together, dreamed together, strove together for the same goal.

At this ceremony of unveiling the tombstone on your grave I am enveloped by gloom. Who knows whether in the future a <u>minyan</u> of Mizrahi members would be able to assemble on the anniversary of your death at your grave. Your grave remains among hundreds and thousands of

abandoned graves on the soil of Poland as a memorial of Polish Jewry which vanished and is no more. Let earth and sky cradle you for eternal sleep, the Polish land, the stepmother which for one thousand years had cradled, nurtured and sustained Polish Jewry, the Polish skyk which for generations witnessed the countless wrongs against the Jews, Jewish tragedies in the land, let the sky and earth embrace you and cradle you to sleep; let the winds rustling among the green leaves of the trees in the Lodz graveyard bring you greetings from the country you dreamt about, let them bring to you the echo of hammer and chisel in the hands of builders of the country from its ruins, the echo of new settlements there, the echo of the swift of the victorious Israel Defence Forces; let it bring you greetings from your comrades in Kvar Etzion who like you laid down their lives for the building of the state of the Jews, ready to receive its sons from the four corners of the world.

~~My~~ May your souls be bound in the bond of life